



MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON



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*Memoirs of*  
TILLY ASTON

AUSTRALIA'S BLIND POET  
AUTHOR AND  
PHILANTHROPIST

MELBOURNE

THE HAWTHORN PRESS

MCMXLVI

HN 2335

A  
copy

## Letter to John Kinmont Moir

Dear Mr Moir:

Will you allow me the honor of dedicating to you this little volume of my life story, as an expression of my appreciation of all that you have done, and are trying to do, for the struggling authors of this country.

Among these I have a place, and shall ever be grateful for the kind and friendly interest you have shown in my efforts to contribute something to the culture of the young nation dwelling in the beams of the Southern Cross.

We know something of the personal sacrifices you have made to help us, and of your gifts of time, money and friendship, most precious in times of stress, and when the literary aspirant is suffering from the apathy of the public towards local talent. This lack of appreciation is apt to drench creative fires, and without such as you might have ended all efforts. It was then you offered words of hope and cheer, and promoted means of public attention to the work of our own writers and artists. I, for one, can never forget how you have helped me, so please let me commemorate my gratitude by this humble dedication.

When you read the pages that follow, possibly you may feel that some of the people mentioned deserve a more expansive treatment. However, you will understand when I say that my intention is only to record the lives of my fellows where they touched my own, and in so doing to suggest the influences which have moulded my career. So please accept my plain, simple and candid story, and with it my desire that you may be long with us to carry on the good work for Australia and its seekers after culture.

TILLY ASTON

MELBOURNE



LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS  
PUBLISHED BY TILLY ASTON

*MAIDEN VERSES.* (Massina, 1901.)

*THE WOOLINAPPERS.* (Spectator Publishing Co., 1905.)

*THE STRAIGHT-GOER.* (Serial in *Spectator*, beginning  
September, 1908.)

*SINGABLE SONGS.* (Robertson & Mullens, 1923.)

*SONGS OF LIGHT.* (Lothian Publishing Co., 1935.)

*GOLD FROM OLD DIGGINGS.*

(Serial in *Bendigo Advertiser* beginning August, 1937.)

✓ *OLD-TIMERS.* (Lothian Publishing Co., 1938.)

✓ *THE INNER GARDEN.* (The Hawthorn Press, 1940.)

Twelve numbers of the *BOOK OF OPALS* issued in  
Braille for the use of blind readers in Oriental lands.

## Why This Story Is Written

Some years ago I was honored to number among my friends Mr Schuler, for many years editor of *THE AGE*, and his beautiful and accomplished wife. In later years Mrs Schuler became blind, and the fine courage with which she faced this calamity will always be one of my most precious recollections. She was a reader and gifted with critical powers beyond the average, and often I would sit at her feet to learn good taste and judgment in matters of culture such as literature and common philosophies discussed among thinking people.

One afternoon, when I was visiting her, the life and writing of Helen Keller came up. She asked me what I thought of the debunking element in the press directed against Miss Keller and her work, and I grew warm in the defence of the American lady, claiming that the journalists were not qualified to understand what a blind person could or could not do, because of a lack of spiritual perception, and I classed the authors of this criticism as pure and unqualified materialists. As we argued, Mr Schuler sat listening mostly, for he was a quiet man and interested in varying viewpoints. Suddenly Mrs Schuler said, "Miss Aston, you can write and talk about other things! Why do you not give us your own life story?"

I laughed, and answered that it would be altogether too tame an affair of work and struggle to offer to the thriller-loving public, especially as I was not likely to find many readers so kind and friendly as herself.

"Quite wrong," came sharply from Mr Schuler, "The story of anyone who has made *ENDEAVOUR* a watch-word is always worth reading. You start right away, while memories are clear and fresh!"

This was Mr Schuler's only word on the subject, but Mrs Schuler was wont to round me up whenever we met.

"Have you started the book yet?" To which I regularly replied, "Not yet."

Many years have passed since that first suggestion was made to me, and in recent times I have thought it might be advisable to make a record of the beginnings of both the Braille Library and The Association for the Advancement of the Blind; for the time is approaching when there will be no person living to rake over the ashes of the past where these two organisations are concerned.

Then came a request from Mr J. K. Moir, president of the Bread and Cheese Club, that I should prepare a short sketch of my life for the Mitchell Library, where my literary works are preserved. The authorities of this institute consider it desirable to obtain authentic information about writers while they themselves can still verify it; so I complied, and in doing so, discovered such interest as to make me bold enough to hope that an extended version might serve the pleasure of some readers, and prove an inspiration to some faced with handicaps of various kinds.

Therefore I begin the story, trusting that some day it may reach a friendly public through the printing press.

But the Schulers were not the only people who urged me to undertake this task. Many friends, including Miss Helena McDougall, Mrs W. Macauley, and my cousin, Mrs Mathie, have discussed it with me; also Stan Brogden and his wife, and a number of those dear blind folk who have been my loyal companions through a lifetime. But I have always felt that these people who love me were prejudiced in my favor and still I feared the indifference of the everyday reader.

Then came the sketch for the Mitchell Library, which reached the hands of Mr W. H. Zercho, of the wide-famed business college. He read it, and offered to have it typed and bound suitably for a record library, and followed up this

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generosity with enthusiastic appreciation of the story and the life it described. In fact, his apparent enjoyment of the tale was so encouraging, that I am setting out on the version which I plan to attain to book size. This may seem to betoken an excess of self-esteem, this record of small things and personal impressions; if so, it must be pardoned, like any other of my faults.

It will be noticed that the story which follows is written in vignettes, rather than in a continuous detail. In this way I have dispensed with some of the rope-and-tackle gear so often used to haul to the surface of memory forgotten or unimportant matters previously handled. Thus I shall try to make these pictures show but the essence of life—candour, truth, endeavor, faith, love, achievement—that those who follow me may walk through the ways which the exigencies of blindness and narrow means have forced me to travel.

## Early Records

I was born at Carisbrook, Victoria, Australia, on 11 December 1873, and claim that I am a link with the pioneering days, that period of greatest progress of our young and happy nation. My parents came as a young married couple from Gloucestershire in the year 1855, spending the first two years in Kapunda, in South Australia; then at the earnest invitation of an uncle of father's, they left Adelaide by the steamer Burra-Burra, landed at Sandridge in due time, and travelled on up-country by bullock waggon, to the small town of Carisbrook, where all our family save the first baby girl were born and reared. Last of the eight children, I came upon the home scene, and each member of the family was old enough to regard me as a pet.

This feeling towards me was accentuated naturally by the fact that early in my infancy it was discovered that there was some defect in my eyes. I had two brothers and three sisters still living, as the baby born in Kapunda had died soon after her arrival in Carisbrook, and a brother of four had been drowned in the creek some years later.

Christmas with its festive doing was at hand when I entered this earthly scene, and I have no doubt there was the usual merry-making. According to custom, ivy draped the doors of our dwelling, and wreathed the windows and framed photographs inside, while a mistletoe bough, brought in from the bush, made the entrance of any of the young girls a rather exciting affair. At dinner we feasted on goose and pork, roasted till the house reeked with the delicious odors of stuffing and gravy; and this was topped up with a rich plum pudding, to which raspberry vinegar gave a most agreeable tang. Be it remembered that our household was strictly blue-ribbon,



and the brandy sauce was not admitted to the fare even on such festive occasions.

Then followed an afternoon of leisure, and at tea-time we tackled the ham, fruits and thick cream, although I marvel that any of us were equal to the task. Whatever shortages or economies must restrain us during the rest of the year, mother never allowed the jollity of Christmas to be damped for her family, therefore I am certain that I, too, was ushered into this happy turmoil, in spite of the anxiety felt about my inflamed eyes. Since that time medical science has found a way of combating the damage to the newly-born by ignorance about the eyes, and for this many bright-eyed men and women should be glad.

There was another interesting event to mark the date of my birth. Up to that time Carisbrook and other towns beyond it had been served with mails and transport by the coaches of Cobb and Co., and my brothers and sisters were familiar with the dust cloud that announced the coming of the coach over the hill, and with the rattle and roar as it swept by on the road in front of our home.

But now a change was at hand; the railway had been constructed from Castlemaine, and had reached the east side of Tullaroop Creek, and was only waiting for the completion of the bridge to sweep into our little town, and take its curved course right on to Maryborough.

Now, the contractors were men of tact and generosity, and they decided to give the children of the town a party on New Year's Day, by taking them for a free ride to Castlemaine and back—the first trip in a train for most of them. Our family was represented by five youngsters, and all assembled on the hill, where the snorting monster was ready to haul them round the foot of Bald Hill, and away to the distant goal over thirty miles away. Mother and father went to see them off on this adventure and their last baby, obviously too young to share it otherwise, attended in mother's arms rolled

up in her grey Paisley shawl which had enfolded more than one of our brood. So I can truthfully say that I was present on the historic occasion, even if I do not remember anything about it.

However, let me get back to the purely personal once more. Our local doctor was a kindly old gentleman, a little roughened, perhaps, by his work as an army surgeon. To him I was carried by my father, and the verdict was anxiously awaited. Dr Howell peered into my eyes, tested them with lights, and said that I was without sight in the right eye, and possibly would lose the other as time went on. He urged my people to see that I got all the care and training possible, that I might grow up happily in spite of the eclipse of the light, and he promised to keep an eye on me always.

To my parents it was good news that I could still see a little, and they resolved that I should have as much of life's advantage as their limited means could provide.

So I started out in my family, loved and guarded, with my childish talents cherished and fostered to the utmost. Father was a shoe-maker, and as he sat at his bench, making and mending for the feet of the community, he would fill my mind with rhymes and tables, and old Gloucestershire songs and tales. He sang well, but not so well as mother, who included in her repertoire quite a list of ancient ballads and folk songs. I did not realise the value of these while she still remembered them, for she sang many which, as far as I can learn, have never appeared in modern collections.

I learned to sing almost before I could talk properly, and to declaim the moral songs of Isaac Watts, as he held up for the edification of children the bad ways of the sluggard, and the good ways of the tiny ant, not to mention those about little birds who agree in the nest, and put to shame quarrelsome sisters and brothers.

As a family we took our pleasures around the old harmonium, singing revival hymns or songs from the Christy



Minstrel books, and these exercises were enhanced by father and Brother Will, both of whom played the flute. It was cheap and innocent amusement for us all.

I was taught to take notice of the things about me, natural objects, astral phenomena, the calls of birds, and the like; also I was encouraged to make simple playthings for myself, to run wild in the bush with the other children, to climb trees, to prowl and investigate the surroundings of the old mines around the town. The independence thus acquired has been one of my chief assets.

Next came the time when serious education must be thought of, and they sent me to a little private school kept by the Misses Annie and Nelly Crooks. My sight was not good enough for much book work, nevertheless I learned to read from giant type books, and to write as children of my age are wont to do; I memorised poetry with ease, and I sang through my tables with utter boredom, since my dear, companionable father had made them all mine long before I entered school.

By degrees change crept in. Brother Will entered the Postal Department, and went to Melbourne for good. Amelia, my eldest sister, had qualified as a teacher in the Education Department, and was away most of the week; then she took a husband, and went to live at Durham Ox. There I often visited her, and still carry with me the memory of the wide plains and distant horizons, the north wind howling round the house, the special flowers—wild peas and everlastings—which made the life up there quite distinctive from that of Carisbrook, sitting among its ironstone hills of low altitude.

Another change was coming, too. My limited vision was fading, but none of us realised this fact. On my sixth birthday I saw the present sent up from Melbourne by Will. It was a pair of gold sleeper earrings, which I was to wear, in the hope, current at the time, that piercing the ears would help the eyes. Valiantly I submitted to the piercing needle,

but there was a bribe behind it, as mother had promised me a fourpenny bit if I did not cry. I did not forget to claim it, either.

That was on my sixth anniversary. On my seventh birthday I received from Melbourne a necklace of those beautiful iridescent shells found about the south coast of Tasmania. This gift I never saw, although I wore it for years. However, I quite understood its charm, for we had among our small home treasures a box of shining shells like them, with which I had played from babyhood. I knew exactly the glory of their changing colors.

So often in the course of my life I am asked how it is I know and can describe effects of light and color; perhaps this one trifling incident may answer someone.

It should be remembered that people who read have rarely seen objects and places pictured in poems and stories, but draw upon memories and impressions to verify a description. With myself and other blind folk it is the same. Although we have not seen a million things we understand quite well, we have seen something else with which we can compare new impressions; something which makes it possible for us to SEE, perhaps more vividly than many unseeing sighted people, the gifts of beauty or grandeur strewn around us.

Thus it will be seen that my physical sight was gone before I reached the age of seven. By this time my father had fallen into bad health, and was no longer able to carry the full burden of supporting his family, although he still did what work he could. Our mother therefore began to accept money as a midwife, a service in the nursing line she had so often performed gratis for her neighbors, and she continued this work after my father's death, when there were still three of her children to be provided for. Father died in October, 1881, but mother survived him over thirty years. To them we are indebted for much, and I pray my reader to bear with me still further, as I offer them my loving tribute.

# My Little Shrine

DEDICATED TO ALL WORTHY PEOPLE WHO LOVE  
THEIR PARENTS

It was Springtime, and a day of blue skies and gold-radiance, when I made one of my pilgrimages to the lowly shrine of my parents. The wide, white road, with its gleaming gravel from the mines near by, led me through shading gum-trees, to the gate of the cemetery; and not many paces more brought me to the spot where they sleep side by side. It was a lovely place in which to rest: verdant grasses, sometimes invading the graves, rustled and whispered about me as if afraid to break the hush over all, shimmering stems of shell grass shook their trembling seeds, and, decking the narrow avenues between the mounds were flowers, wild flowers—spider orchids, scarlet runner with blossoms like rubies, billy buttons tall of stalk and plump of bloom, daisy peas and wild geranium, the beautiful darlings of the bush lands around Carisbrook.

I remember how, as children, we loved this place.

Here, where the cattle browsed not, Nature had full scope for her glories. In those days the lurking snake and scuttling lizard had few terrors for us, and we gathered our Springtime garlands in this garden of peace.

Here, then, among the flowers, and not far from the guardian eucalypts at the farther end of the burying ground, my father and mother lie waiting for eternity. They were a humble pair. Both were born in Gloucestershire, one at Five-acres, and the other at Lane-end; and simple as the names of their birthplaces was the life they led. They loved, and were married in England, and a few weeks later set sail for this

land of hope and youth. Their ship, the *John Banks*, set them down in Adelaide, after a voyage of four months. They remained in South Australia for two years and their first child, a daughter, was born, and named Eliza. Then the gold fever seized them, and in addition came an invitation from an uncle of father's who had settled at Carisbrook in Victoria. So they took their passage by the steamer *Burra Burra*, and landed at Sandridge with the baby and all their possessions.

But still more than a hundred miles must be traversed to get to the country town, and this was done by bullock waggon—a truly terrible experience for the young mother, as her little one, about a year old, was ill.

The jolting over the rough track made travel in the waggon impossible for the frail infant, so, taking it turn about, the parents walked all the journey, carrying the little sufferer in their arms. In due time they arrived at the orchard, where they stayed for a few months, but the babe did not survive, and her death was the first real sorrow which the young couple faced together. Soon, however, came another child to comfort them, my eldest sister, Charlotte Amelia.

After a period of life in a tent, they made a home and settled in the little town, and father plied his trade as a boot-maker and planted a garden about his house. Six other children were born there — William, George, Sophia, Stephen, another Eliza and myself, Matilda Ann. My brother George had perished in the creek near by, but he had come and gone before my time.

In the Wesleyan chapel opposite our home we learned to know God, and to follow in the paths of rectitude the two who rest in this garden of sleep. I knelt on the kerb which marks off their grave, and thought about them and their struggles. We brought father here when I was eight, and mother thirty-one years later. What did I owe them? They had never gathered wealth; they had not the money-gathering



talent. Perhaps they were a little too frank, somewhat over-cautious, as aiming at material gain calls for great restraint in dealing with the weaknesses of others, and it also demands a willingness to take risks.

But our parents left us some things that were more precious than money. First, by wise use of their small means we were helped to sound, healthy bodies by good food, comfortable clothing and a judicious use of recreation. Sometimes as children we envied our neighbors who wore finer feathers, or frolicked at the fortnightly quadrille parties; but maturer knowledge has revealed our actual gains. For good health, therefore, we thank our parents.

Having little book learning, they were nevertheless astute and endowed with wisdom. They knew that advancing time would require advances in education, so they strove and toiled and planned to give their children the utmost advantage in this sphere, and for this, too, I lift up a thankful heart now, as I did beside their grave.

But the most precious legacy was something outside the material realm, and quite incalculable in words and figures. It was that sense of justice, truth and honesty which is the foundation of all human relations. A promise, whether by pen or word, must be inviolable; there were no white lies, only one sort—Lies! Truth must be spoken or lived out, at whatever cost; to cheat, to steal, to trick, or in any way defraud another was dishonesty. Father had a mind full of maxims, and lived up to them. His standard of honesty was this: "It is a sin to steal a pin."

It was in this rigid school that we were reared. To what extent the modern laxities have whittled down the bars is not easy for me to judge, but this was the grand and glorious heritage to which I and my brothers and sisters were heirs.

It was not only the moral law which they gave us. "The fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom" they taught, so we learned reverence, obedience, charity and love. We were not

allowed to forsake Church and Sunday-school while we were with our parents; we were expected to fall in with their religious principles. Some say this is tyranny; well, thank God for our tyrants, at least. We dared not drift when we were too weak to steer ourselves, and when we were old enough, we had no desire to do so. Thus, for my spiritual foundations I honor my parents' memory. Who will blame me that I bent and rested my face upon the earth which covered them, and lifted up to God a grateful heart, because I had once known the love and sound guidance of two such splendid people.

As the world classes them, they were nobodies. Father, a humble tradesman; mother, a simple, untaught rustic girl, who learned to read at Sunday-school, and never penned a line until chance took her lover away to a distant town for a time, when she mastered the art of writing so as to be able to write her own thoughts to him without the intervention of an outsider. This is their record—just plain Edward and Ann Aston—but to me my Father and Mother.

## The Little Home Town

Without some kind of sketch of my birthplace, drawn from the depths of memory, it might be difficult to understand the background of my literary work, so I insert such a picture, fraught with much pleasure to me at least. Perhaps it also may bring back memories to some other old natives of Carisbrook as well.

This little town, in the heart of Victoria, nestled at the junction of Deep Creek and Macallum's Creek; rocky Bald Hill and Charlotte Plains to the east, and to the north and west the gold-bearing ridges of Maryborough and its satellite townships. Carisbrook had been designed as the chief town, but high land values drove the people out, and with the population our glory departed to Maryborough. For decades there was rivalry between the two places. We ardently hated those Maryborough bosses and delighted to "lick" them at games or anything else.

But now the "Brook" is a sleepy little village, where old-timers may rest, with very rare upstirrings of the spirit of the inhabitants. Yet, glory we did have at one time! Just recall the courthouse. Naturally, that shrine of justice was not without its unwilling devotees. Sometime the old boys would have a spree, and find themselves in "The Logs" next morning. There was a story of two such, father and son, reaching the same refuge on the same night, and the father's wailings at daybreak, when they awoke to find each other.

"Ah, Dinny, me bhoy, that I should find ye here! Ochone, Ochone! Locked up for too much of the crather. Sure, you'll break the heart of your mother, and bring blushes to your father's face when he comes before His Honor!" and so the lamentation went on.



Not far away from the Temple of Justice was the town hall, home of magic and wonders. The picture addict of today knows nothing about thrilling entertainment, since he never entered that town hall in the 'seventies and 'eighties of last century. In that auditorium visiting companies staged varieties, rowdy political meetings left much rubbish to be cleaned up next morning, lectures and concerts and local talent called folk together, and the boys understood the art of applause.

Some may recall a lecture by the Rev. Ralph Brown, "Heads and Faces," at the conclusion of which the lecturer invited subjects from the audience to volunteer for a public head-reading. One of these volunteers was a member of the gentler sex, and among other things she was described as amative—that is, the lecturer explained, she has great attraction for the opposite sex. Then broke forth a roar of mirth which astonished the lecturer, for he did not know that the lady being "read" had a reputation like that of the woman of Samaria.

Any old Carisbrookite will remember the "blue-ribbon" meetings in the town hall. Their ostensible purpose was the spread of temperance principles, but in the light of wider knowledge I fear these gatherings did more for budding musicians and reciters in our midst.

How wonderful were these performers—at least, our Mary and our Bill, whilst we would sniff with contempt at Jack and Sarah from a rival family, who either sang like "a bee in a bottle" or "bleated like mother So-and-so's billygoat." Storms raged around those rivalries, but now it is all a quiet and rather humorous recollection of our youthful days.

We also had our local nigger minstrel shows, organised by some of the young men. The population flocked to the town hall on the occasion of these shows, simmering with excitement, for nobody could guess which of our townsfolk would be the butt of Mr Bones. The idiosyncrasies of any one of us

might be aired before the snickering audience, and the victim dared not take offence. I was perhaps a little too young to appreciate the fun, but I recall the gusts of laughter over Dave Ronane's burlesque of the plaintive American songs the troop was wont to sing in the fashion of that time.

One reason why I can revert so clearly to those entertainments was the imitations by my brother Steve, for he was a splendid mimic and a typical boy, who filled our little house with the clicking of home-made bones, making his performances the more realistic by blackening his face. If entertainment is joy and laughter, and rich anticipation beforehand, then nothing could excel what we had at those simple amateur concerts in the town hall at Carisbrook.

We had a brass band, too, in which my father took a prominent part. It would enliven the town on all public occasions, blast defiance at election rallies, and march in the solemn procession at the funeral of any citizen of note. It provided the cultural element for many who found no other outlet, and was a sound expression of the public spirit of the inhabitants.

And the dances, with Mr Jim Herd as M.C. They were the chief joy of all the young girls—that is, of those who were allowed to attend them; for some of them, like my older sisters, had puritan parents, who frowned on such worldly frolickings. Naturally, a scandal came to light when it became known that a rebel or two had slipped out late at night to the quadrille party, exit by the bedroom window. We puritan maidens had to be content to display our finery at the Sunday-school anniversary.

There were four flourishing churches, each a social centre as well as a spiritual lighthouse. Apart from a little bigotry, we all met as neighbors, and the general effort was always upwards, and towards better things. There was, however, a slightly primitive touch among us, for we did not like strangers, by which I mean newcomers.

For about twenty years the mining had definitely shifted to the north-west, leaving a small population devoted to farming and gardening, with enough tradesmen and shopkeepers to serve the others. An exclusive society had developed, so that, when deep mining began, and there was an influx of rovers seeking work of this kind, we did not feel particularly cordial to them. They were mostly Cornish and Welsh, while the settled inhabitants were English or Irish, with a sprinkling of other nationalities. We resented the invaders almost as much as if they had been enemy aliens, and laid many things to their charge. They were shameless borrowers; they kept those abominations, coursing dogs, and wickedly went hunting on Sundays. They also had multitudes of goats, which devoured every green thing in sight. Now, in former times all of us had kept the useful nanny for our milk supply, but the 'seventies had found us more prosperous, and in possession of a cow; therefore we hated the goat, against whose ravages no garden fence could protect us. The starved dog was even more odious; nothing in the shape of food was safe from it. If mother left a dish of boiled bacon on the bench at the back door to cool, a lithe form would leap over the fence, snatch the joint, and vanish in a flash. Through the kitchen door would come a long-legged streak, and away would go our loaf of bread or a slab of mother's toothsome dripping-cake. Oh, those Cousin Jacks and their thieving greyhounds were the bane of our lives!

And was it they who rose in the dark hours of the morning and milked our cow dry for us? Who was it that cleaned up our apricot tree in the night, just before our annual supply of that favourite jam was to be made? And who got off with our firewood, chopped by my brother ready for the Saturday cooking? Who knows, I ask? We thought we knew, but did we? I imagine now that it must have been one black sheep family all the time, and may we be forgiven if we falsely imputed these unsocial acts to any innocent person.

The Carisbrook folk were not without sports. The children wandered in the bush and learned to play with flower chains and bark whistles, to ride a rocking bough, or trail a sapling hobby-horse. Thus we became very intimate with nature, and gathered treasures of knowledge of the life around us both in the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

In the days of our childhood the creeks were beautiful, with their red-gums, their rushes and their water-lilies, and there the men angled for the tasty blackfish, and the boys filled buckets with yabbies or crayfish, or haunted the swimming-holes in spite of occasional accidents. The sharp crack of the sporting gun echoed over the rises, resulting often in a rabbit or hare for the table, or a delicious parrot pie. Thus, in contact with nature our children grew robust and hardy, getting ready for the strenuous times that must come to all in later years.

Of course, we had organised games, and our Fire Brigade, under the captaincy of Mr Jim Herd. When fires broke out, our gallants were all ready for such emergencies with their primitive equipment, and many a good save was made, in spite of the pine-box style of house which sheltered most of our families.

Such was the general mixture of life at the common level in the little home town. But, as in other places, there were some that did not belong to the common level. We had some derelicts, well below the surface. Of these I gave a picture in my book, *Old Timers*, although in that little volume it was rather the type than the individual which was presented. At the opposite end of the scale was the thin rank of men and women who rose, like cream on milk, to offer their richer qualities to the community. Many of them sought the city, and rose to distinction. Do not forget that Carisbrook had seen Billy Barlow in his comedy acts, and the camels of Burke and Wills through the town on the fateful journey. And we had orators, who arose at meetings and talked themselves



into trips to Melbourne, to demand from the Government an improved railway service or a new water supply. Any of my fellow townsmen of that time will agree, however, that the outstanding local man was Colly Clarkson. His name has been given to nothing better than a mud-hole near the station, "Lake Colly," and probably he has never been heard of outside the district, friend as he was to all, and a real power among us. Officially he was Town Clerk, and Registrar of births and deaths. He and his family lived behind a wonderful shop, where we could buy beads and balls, pens and paper, and toys of all descriptions—penny lines in particular—and the knick-knacks for fancy work, dear to the heart of young misses. Collier Clarkson sang a lusty bass in the Wesleyan Church choir, was, in fact, to the fore in everything.

But these statements do not convey any impression of the kindness and outstanding wisdom of the man. To him went all who were perplexed and troubled. The law was known to him; he could make a will or draw up a contract, and the buying of land, mining shares, and similar subtleties gave him no worry. Those who went to him were never rebuffed. He helped my mother when her husband died, and to me, as to other young orphans, he was a friend and father. "Patriarch" is the best title I can think of for him, and when he grew old and feeble the community was left like a flock without a shepherd.

I should like to drift along, writing of the many fine sturdy families in and around our town, but this chapter, which is intended to exhibit the background of my later experiences, will not hold the complete story. However, I cannot deny myself the right of a little boasting about my first earthly abiding place.

It shall be brief. Carisbrook has shared its cream with the outer world, and here is mention of a few. We gave this land a bishop in the work of George Merrick Long, a worthy Pres-

byterian divine in Lewis Hurse. This last family also contributed a medical man in Dr Walter Hurse, whose name, by the way, we used to spell Harse. Likewise, we gloried in the successful career of the two Frickes, one as chairman of the Country Roads Board, and the other as Secretary of the Treasury. These two claimed my special pride, as we Frickes and Astons derived from the same great grandparents.

Deputy Postmaster Kitto, though not born within our boundaries, was reared there, and thus gives us a claim.

There were many other citizens who did more than a citizen's job for their country, too many, I regret to mention here. But perhaps some of the old hands have a little pride in recalling their blind author and poet, who is also devoutly thankful that she was born in a spot where so many good things could enter her soul, and perhaps be preserved in writing for the time when such pioneer towns are wiped away from our land.

My dear little home town! My heart is filled with pleasure when in thought I ramble there, gathering flowers, paddling in the creek, and sharing the games of the children who were our neighbours. Then came the day of leave-taking, when I must come to Melbourne for education, and only vacation visits remained to keep alive the impressions of my first eight years.

## Playground

Although we children often wandered afield to the bush, or to the clear, cool waters of the creek, my own favourite playground was the garden about our home. I cannot resist the sweetness of recalling it here, even if my reader finds the picture trifling and dull.

If you happen to be driving through the little town of Carisbrook, you will pass the spot where I was born.

The house, now vanished, was a shop and dwelling, opposite the Wesleyan Chapel, quite a humble abode in its quarter-acre garden. Grapevines grew on a framework at the side, making a verandah-like shade over door and windows, and other buildings, far from elegant, presented a rather rugged face towards the road; but behind these!— Oh, here was my childhood's Eden. My parents loved a garden and everything grew for them. Come with me and behold the magic of it all, as memory paints it for me.

First was the dairy, covered with a great sprawling cloth-of-gold rose, from which we gathered a perpetual supply of cream and butter-coloured buds, ever welcome as gifts for neighbours who loved beauty. Along the side fence were lilac, laburnum and banksia rose, each in turn making a glorious show of colour, both in house and garden. At the lower corner stood a spreading elder, and it provided its seasonal joys of snowy blooms, red ripening berries, and glossy black clusters of the late autumn fruit. These were always left for the bird-feasts, for we had too much fruit of a more desirable kind to tackle the acid berries, and our "No Alcohol" principles precluded the making of wine from them.

Another part of the garden was mother's especial care. Here would be found crocus, daffodil and hyacinth, whose



remote ancestors grew in her garden of girlhood in Gloucestershire, and with them all kinds of fragrant herbs, balm, thyme, mint, rosemary and verbenas, supplied our potherbs and scent for the linen box. Ivy, jasmine and honeysuckle were there, too, a crowd of perfumed courtiers where my mother was queen.

And these were not all. Springtime had its stocks and wall-flowers, anemones and poppies; in a quiet corner honesty whispered to love-in-the-mist, and the bleeding-heart drooped—sad and lonely. But perhaps the pride of place was held by a clump of primroses, reminders of the lanes and meadows of the Forest of Dean, and geraniums bent above them to shield them from our summer sun, glowing too fiercely for those tender plants of the old world.

And what of mother's violets? They were of the small, dark-blue kind, all crumpled looking, but richer in perfume than any of the queens and duchesses of the present-day violet family. I love to recall the neat borders in which they grew, shimmering with purple bloom above the dark green foliage.

Father also had his plot. He loved flowers, but was responsible for the welfare of his family, so his treasures were crisp cabbage and lettuce, rows of carrots and turnips, and pale marrows of a creamy texture that went well with our lamb or beef. Neither did we disdain the homely sprout or turnip-tops, especially when boiled with a chunk of home-cured bacon. A few trees provided the necessary fruit, but most of this kind of food came from another garden which we had planted near the junction of the creeks, and on which my father laboured incessantly during the later years of his life.

This was the Eden I lived in, and my pastimes were those of the country child. I could make small flutes from the young stems of the elder, squeakers from wild barley, tiny wind-mills of straw, which would turn slowly in the hand, umbrellas from thistle-blooms, chains of cape-weed daisies; all amused me in that small sanctuary behind our house. I was

rich if I had a golden beetle, shells from the creek, or a bunch of gay feathers. We played riding and weddings, funerals and tea-parties, bushranging and exploring, with an election now and then. Of course, the happenings in the town each in turn suggested a new game, and I wonder if I ever went to mother and asked her, "What can I play next?"

The trouble was that my maternal relative was always interrupting my games to drag me indoors for meals or bedtime. Often an imaginary couple would be left at the altar half married, or a funeral in solemn procession would be summarily dispersed, just because of a parental decree that I must have a clean pinafore, or eat a tasty and nourishing dinner. This kind of play had its advantages; it encouraged resourcefulness, and was cheap, healthy, and satisfying. As I was the last of the family, and my sister next in line was nearly eight years older than myself, it followed that I was obliged to make my own amusements as a rule, and to spend my happy days in our dear old garden, where almond and apricot hummed with bees in early spring, and the summer was a procession of lovely things.

## The Coming of the Darkness

As stated before, the first few years of my life were filled with loving care, and with the conscientious effort to build up my mind as well as my body to the full. But the time now approached when shadows began to fall on us in more senses than one. My father's health began to fail and his malady increased as the months went by; the brick portion of our house developed cracks, due to the underground subsidences of old mining operations; a cement cistern for catching the rain for household use, which had been put down at very heavy cost to us with our limited means, also cracked, and would hold no water.

Mother was forced to undertake more nursing, and to be away from home very often, for father could work only a part of the time, and it became harder to make ends meet.

My eldest sister was teaching by this time, and stood behind her family loyally, while all the time it grew apparent that the old doctor was right when he had predicted total blindness for me. It became usual for me to shield my eyes from strong sunlight with my arm across my brow, and my little hands were ever out around me, searching for contacts to aid me in moving about the house and garden. Gradually it crept upon me—first a mist over everything, then a grey twilight through which objects showed indistinctly. Finally, the world vanished, never again to be visible to the bodily eye, and by my seventh birthday total eclipse of sight had fallen on me.

In deep distress my mother was forced to realise the fact; she had kept watch, always hoping that the darkness would not be complete, but one day, holding up a bunch of flowers to me (it must have been springtime, for they were red

anemones) she asked, "What have I got for my little pet?" Out went my hands to feel, and at that I was gathered to my mother's heaving bosom, and she kissed me over and over again, crying through her bitter weeping, "Oh, my baby! My baby is blind! She will never see the flowers any more!"

Fond, faithful mother! She did not understand in that moment of cruel anguish, that memory has a more permanent vision than the eye, and that her little sightless daughter had stowed away a thousand lovely pictures of earth and sky, of autumn's grassy velvet, and the plumey trees along the banks of the creeks; and that among these pictures would be mother's anemones and lilac, the gold of laburnum chains, and the rosy softness of the almond blossom. Best picture of all is the recollection of her own smiling face, as she sat with her children around the tea-table on Sunday evening, with her husband at the head, listening calmly, or joining in the chatter and mirth.

This gradual fading of the light seems to have made little change in my own view of things. I went on climbing fences and fruit trees, running errands for mother, and sharing in the play of the neighbour children. I must confess that my guardian did not always know how venturesome were those games. We wandered into the bush, regardless of the number of snakes among logs and rocks; we played about the creek, walking logs that had fallen across the stream; we dared the dizzy heights of the poppet-heads at a new mine opened up just behind the school. Perhaps the finest jaunts of all occurred when a fresh supply of pipe-clay was needed for white-washing the big fireplace and the kitchen walls. Then would I mount my chariot—a large box on wheels—and with Steve as horse and sister Lizzie as outrider, we would gallop away for a full afternoon in the wilds, where a worked-out mine filled all the whitewash requirements of the town.

With the spread of farming, entailing the destruction of native plant life, and the infiltration of alien flora, with the

clogging of the natural watercourses with mining slum and dredging operations, a change has come over the land in most country centres like Carisbrook; therefore I feel that, in recording such detail the impressions of my childhood, both in this chronicle and in my other books, I am preserving something for later Australians which may shortly be unrecoverable, if not preserved now. The country, the flora, and the fauna to which our pioneering parents came, is worth remembering, even if it cannot be saved in any other way.

By the end of my eighth year my father had left us for the higher life. The shadows of that period are still heavy and sad, as I recall the pageant of death, the casket, and the flowers, the mourning and tears, the crepe bands and the long cortege that followed our dear one to the cemetery.

In these days, I know, there is a confirmed objection to including children in such scenes; however, I am not sorry to have known those solemn hours, for it has added to my experience, and we cannot begin learning the lessons of life too soon, especially as I am sure that the very young do not suffer in such matters the poignant grief of older people. Since then I have had to farewell all my immediate family, and to find myself the last surviving member. Yet, it is life and not to be long grieved over, for I have had them, and loved them all, and they passed on, like a million other precious things.



## Foundation Years

My father died in October, and the ensuing summer was not altogether a happy time for me. Left much to myself, and missing the companionship I had always enjoyed in the shoe-making shop with my daddy, I moped and wandered aimlessly all day, while my playmates were busy in school. I sometimes cried for no apparent reason, with my face in mother's lap when her arduous work permitted her to be at home for an hour or two; then I sickened with fever—low fever they called it, but I suppose it was mild typhoid, and I recovered. My people taught me many things to kill time. I could thread beads, cut paper dolls, and sew my dolly garments after a fashion.

I grew handy with a knife and used to cut up the beans, peel potatoes and apples, and prepare fruit for jam and pickling. But still it was not enough to fill my time. I paid a visit to my sister at Durham Ox, where horizons were wide, and the lonely plains full of spiritual secrets of which I have sometimes written in my verses, for example, in "The Impress of Silence." From my sister I learned to knit, a simple handicraft which has served and comforted me incalculably in later years. Still, I was not sufficiently occupied and was unhappy.

But a change was at hand. One day there appeared at our door in Carisbrook a very interesting stranger. He was tall and sturdy, loud-voiced and sociable, with a broad Cornish accent that had the cheerful up-and-down intonation of the cousin-jack dialect. In due time we learned that he had lost both eyes and one arm in a mine explosion, and had set out to make a life work for himself as a kind of missionary and home-teacher to the blind, with the help and patronage of the

Hon. Richard Baker and a few other Christian philanthropists of this colony.

All over the country this rugged old missionary travelled, led by his dog through streets and highways, until he halted at some door, such as ours, where some blind person, young child or octogenarian, needed the light of an embossed alphabet and the comfort of an understanding friend. This picturesque figure was well known in many parts of Victoria at that period, and many sightless people now departed owe to Mr Thomas James a debt of gratitude which as a rule can only be paid in the bright hereafter.

Wherever a blind person could be discovered, thither went the blind man and his dog, proffering some free instruction in reading, and perchance a gift of a gospel, or other portions of Scripture on loan.

His mission was quickly explained at the Aston door, and he was at once taken in, with his intelligent and friendly canine off-sider, Fido. Out came his A.B.C. card, his embossed texts, his Braille writing-frame, each in turn seized upon by the eager young pupil hungering and thirsting for knowledge, and for fresh occupations to sharpen her wits upon. When he departed on the following day, he left the wherewithal for me to continue my studies and his leave-taking was a petition at the Throne of Grace that I might be kept and blessed, and make something of my life for my family and my nation. I can recall his earnest voice as he prayed for the little maid, for her mother in widowhood, that both should see the light of God's face through and above all troubles, and that my blindness should prove rather a source of love and joy than a burden and a heartache. Mr James was a good and devout man, and who can say that his petition was not answered.

I soon learned to read Braille, and this was the start of my education as a blind child, but it was merely a ripple on the pond. Within a few months the choir from the Asylum and School for the Blind in Melbourne came to Carisbrook to give

a concert, and the superintendent, Rev William Moss, urged that I should be sent to school without delay. It was a fearful wrench for mother to send her little one away from home for the greater part of the year, but the decision was made, and in June 1882, my box was packed, and a resigned and saddened mother took her small, excited daughter and went to the city by train, and there I entered the school, and set out upon the great adventure of a serious search for knowledge. I need not say that this quest continues, even to this present hour.

The complete change from a home, where I had been the loved and cherished baby, to a large and comfortless building where I was by no means the cynosure, was, perhaps, a trifle hard on a rather sensitive child, nevertheless, it was a wise move, for here, among my fellow pupils, blind like myself, I must give as well as take, must share the extremely plain food, the discipline, and the work that were appointed for all. One circumstance lightened the road considerably; there were many older girls, young women in fact, who found an outlet for their maternal instinct in caring for the little ones, and my two kindly guardians were very devoted to me, and kept me well protected from many mistakes into which I could have fallen.

Of course, I had unhappy moments, but generally speaking I was too busy to fret and was finding satisfaction in the small achievements of my daily tasks.

At the head of the institution was the kindly and benevolent William Moss, who proved a veritable father to the little orphan from Carisbrook. In the light of later knowledge I have realised that his views upon the education and training of the blind were well in line with the times, and in some particulars ahead of them. He believed in the ability of his charges, and encouraged them to try out life for themselves, as seen by the list of those who made their way in the outside world in those early days. In addition to this influence, the

companionship of my fellow pupils was a gain to me, for we tried our powers against one another and practised useful rivalries. It is not necessary to enlarge on the friendships formed in those far-off days, for who does not know the particular glamor of the word "school-mate," and I still count some such in my circle today.

We had some earnest and conscientious teachers, too. These led us through the mazes of the ordinary curriculum, reading to us, dictating lessons as we copied them in Braille, and aiding us in tracing the few embossed maps available. Our studies in music were fostered eagerly, for we must demonstrate our ability at concerts and church services. Handicrafts were taught, and as soon as our work was good enough to sell, it went out to the limited markets. I made good progress in all spheres with ever increasing hope that, after graduation, I should find a successful career and a chance to earn a living for myself, and for mother when she grew too old for the battle. To her, my leaving home had been yet another sorrow, as she saw me disappear through the door leading to the playground, and I know that other parents of blind children must face that trial. However, my dear mater was able later on to sum it up in this way: "I felt when I saw you go that it was like burying you, but when you learned and grew and were happy, that was like a resurrection."

## School Days

The first long vacation arrived at the end of six months, scattering the pupils of the school for the blind in all directions, to spend the Christmas holidays with their families or friends. I was, of course, due at my home in Carisbrook, where I should resume my old place as family pet. As the time for this interlude approached, we youngsters worked out complicated problems of mental arithmetic, reduction of days to hours, hours to minutes, to give us the exact time that must pass before we set out for home. There were playtime battles over the exact moment of departure, plans for treats and feasts we would have in our respective spots of joyous freedom from school discipline. Then one morning before daybreak, everybody was astir, the vans pulled up at the front door to receive passengers and luggage, and away we went to the various trains which were to carry us each to his own particular "Happy Valley."

The journey by rail was still a novelty to me. I had been an unconscious guest at the opening of that line which linked Carisbrook with Castlemaine, soon after my birth. Further, as soon as I could share in the excursions of other children, nothing could give me more pleasure than to meet the Melbourne train, to thrill with the noise and excitement, and to watch with amazement the beautiful green and gold engine, hissing like a thousand snakes as the excess steam escaped through its valves. Now I was the traveller on a journey brimful of delightful experience—strenuous puffing on the uphill climb, swinging plunges on the down grades, the echoing tunnel, the clickety-clack of the wheels, the wind racing past the carriage windows, and the touch shadows of objects fleeing backward, in reality the telegraph poles and



bridges past which we fled. And at last the breathless excitement as the engine shrieked its warning somewhere about the back of Bald Hill, and swooped down into the valley of Tullaroop Creek, over the bridge, and into the station with mammoth sighs of exhausted steam—and here was I, in mother's arms again, after an absence of six months.

Then followed forty days of play and petting, a resumption of former interests, of visits to favorite playgrounds, and all the fun and novelty of a holiday from school. But always, as the vacation drew towards its close, there would awaken a longing for school, for its companions, tasks, and achievements. At last, one day in early February, the box would be stuffed full with new clothes, a supply of goodies and any treasures collected while at home, and someone would accompany me to Castlemaine to join the train from Bendigo, which brought fellow pupils back from their holiday resorts up further north.

This annual trip to my home was the adventure of the year, and often afforded some unusual rencontres which are still remembered with amusement. Sometimes it was our fellow travellers who gave us the laugh. On one occasion an old gentleman enlivened the journey with stories about every place at which we stopped. He had lived in this town so many years, in that so many more; he had worked on the diggings for a lengthy period, and also served on a station for nearly a generation. Then we grew suspicious about his figures, and began to count the years he had occupied in his odyssey, and got up to two hundred and seventy-four by the time we parted, and as that did not include many more before our count began, we reckoned the old boy must be a runner-up for Methuselah.

There is another travel story of those vacation trips which I am tempted to record. Several of us girls were in the train when an elderly couple got in at a wayside station, with plenty of fuss and much settling in of themselves and their luggage.

This over, the old lady made an inspection of her fellow passengers.

Some blind children! Dear, dear! Her heart welled up in kindly feeling, as she exclaimed, "Oh, Ned, they are blind! Poor dears! How terrible! They would be better in their graves!"

Ned made no reply, and we giggled quietly. It was so strange that miserable, blind children should be laughing. It puzzled the old lady, and presently she sidled along the seat to where Clara was sitting, and cleared her throat preparatory to some conversation.

"Are you blind?" she bawled point-blank into Clara's ear.

"Yes, Ma'am," was the meek reply.

"They *are* blind, Ned! Ain't it awful!"

Turning again to Clara, she yelled, "Can you feed and dress yourselves?"

"Yes, Ma'am," came the same meek response. The other girls knew Clara, and waited in a simmer of fun. The questioner informed her husband that they could feed and dress themselves, "And they are quite tidy, too," she added with a sigh.

The next interrogation rose in a shout above the roar of the train, "And are you deaf and dumb, too?"

"Yes, Ma'am!"

"Oh, how dreadful, Ned! She is deaf and dumb, too."

At this Ned burst forth violently, "Aht, you old fool! How could she answer you if she is deaf and dumb?"

Naturally, that ended the questionnaire, and we youngsters hung out the windows to conceal our tears of mirth, quite impossible to restrain.

The reader may wonder that such stories are related of my schooldays rather than successes and failures in history, geography, and spelling. Well, no lesson has proved more valuable to me than those learned from my mates outside teaching hours, and the finest of them all was the capacity to

find a humorous aspect in many of the embarrassing situations in life that must come to a blind person, and just as important is the wisdom to assess it at its true value, the kindness of both close and casual acquaintances, even when marred by irritating awkwardness; at times an act of friendly solicitude is offered in such an exasperating fashion that it takes some philosophy to maintain a serene exterior, and a supreme sense of humour to suppress any show of sensitiveness. It may be guessed by some how difficult it is to continue smiling when a dear old lady remarks that blind people should not be allowed to go about, lest their physical defect might upset an expectant mother; or, a too practical commentator reasons that blind people do not need so much money for dress, as they cannot see what they are wearing—both of which situations have been presented to me at one time or another. But we did learn to smile through it, and thus I acquired that faculty for fun that has given me patience and poise in my relations with all kinds of men and women, however tactless their behaviour. But I would like it clearly understood that such examples of “pack” psychology are the exceptions, and I grow old in the happy conviction that most fellow beings whom I have met are human and humane, gentle and friendly, and would never wound the feelings of a handicapped person if they knew it.

Life at school was not unlike that at any boarding-school of the period. We had our red-letter days, and got into our little scrapes. The food was generally not interesting, and our efforts to supplement it were the most common causes of our troubles with the matron. We were wont to procure potatoes and onions for the winter evenings, which could be roasted in the playroom fire. Their delicious odors would betray us; down would come the hand of authority and stir up fire and cookery into a fiercely glowing mass, and we would be left lamenting our lost and perished supper. But another night would come, with more potatoes and onions,

and perhaps better luck, and I must confess that we young rebels won more often than we lost.

In the year 1888 there occurred a big exhibition in Melbourne, at which our institution was a daily exhibitor. I had my share in demonstrating the school work, and during the weeks that great show was open many joys came my way. I met some people who remained friends for years after; I heard many of the fine concerts conducted by Sir Frederick Cowan, and other exhibitors allowed us, in the tea hour, to inspect in our own touch fashion, things of art and science never likely to come under our exploring fingers again.

Among them was a collection of embossed maps from a blind printing house in Germany, quite a revelation to me, as it indicated a much higher grade of teaching in this line than we had received.

In fact, the whole exhibition was an uplift to my mind, and I grew ambitious to explore wider fields of knowledge than the curriculum at my own school offered. In this desire I was encouraged by the fatherly superintendent, Rev William Moss. Always a believer in the higher education of the blind, he arranged for me to go on with new studies, and as an inducement promised that, if I qualified, I should have a place on the teaching staff of the school, a promise which he did not live to fulfil.

Meanwhile we read of distinguished blind people; we pondered the courage and originality of Braille, of Henry Fawcett, and many other successful blind, but perhaps the most important stimulus came from a local source. In Melbourne a certain couple named Conolly had settled, and established a college for sighted girls, where Mr Conolly, himself quite blind, and a graduate of an English University, took his place as head teacher.

These kindly folk visited our school, and they thought they saw in me a likely candidate for the university here, and were generous in their encouragement to that end.



So I thought, "If Mr Conolly can teach, if Mr Fawcett can be Postmaster-General of Great Britain, if Homer, Ossian, and Milton could write glorious poetry, if Metcalf could build roads where no sighted engineer had succeeded, and many other 'ifs' of like order, then why could not I make good, too, and rise above the general level of my fellow blind?"

My teacher, Miss Mary Campbell, was out to do all she could for me, too. She began my preparation for the matriculation examination, and in due time that milestone was passed successfully.

In the meantime my life had altered somewhat, for my brother Steve had settled in Melbourne, made a home for his mother, and to this home I went for week-ends and holidays. The years away from my family had weaned me from them to a degree, but under this new arrangement our kinship gradually resumed its glamor and sweetness.

Of course, there were times when my own folk protested at my aims for independence and self-realisation, pleading their love and care for me and their willingness to support me, but with my temperament this could not be. I am afraid that this difference occasionally led to a want of understanding, yet, I knew what I wanted and must have, and love grew and flourished, and is still with me, in spite of the fact that all have reached their goal, while I still bide on earth, waiting for that reunion which faith and Christian hope has promised to us.

One other event made a deep impression on that period of my life. Our beloved superintendent, Mr Moss, apparently in reasonable health and vigor, suddenly slipped into the last sleep one morning while awaiting his breakfast. How we mourned his sudden death! All of us had lost a true friend, but I had lost a father once more. Had he lived I believe my own life would have followed a very different plan.



## WANDA, THE ABORIGINE

### A SCHOOLDAY'S MEMORY

Black Wanda came to school one day,  
A blind and wistful child,  
Torn from his tribal woodland glades  
Far back in bushland wild.

For he had learned the rider's skill  
With squatter's untamed colt,  
To chase the wind and leap the stream  
Like archer's feathered bolt.

Till came the luckless fall, that marred  
This spirit of the light:  
Gone was the grace of slender limb,  
And quenched the lamps of sight.

So Wanda came to live with us,  
Where sightless children learn,  
But ever for his native bush  
This sad young heart would yearn.

We sang him songs that children love,  
With lilting tunes and gay;  
He only heard the magpies flute  
Their joys at break of day.

MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

We told him tales of man and beast;  
He listened, gently meek;  
Our eager words had but the sound  
Of babbling mountain creek.

And if perchance we crooning sang  
A mournful tune and slow,  
This spirit wild would hear again  
His people's chants of woe.

His slender hands were guided oft  
Along the dotted lines,  
But never did the meaning break  
From Braille's embossed signs.

His body walked beside us, and  
His toneless voice we heard,  
But Wanda's ears were filled with songs  
That came from forest bird.

At night reed-warblers spun their notes,  
Like moonshine silver, clear,  
The curlew by the waterhole  
Uttered his wailings drear.

The muffled mopoke kept his watch,  
While sighing breezes crept,  
Stirring the rustling eucalypts,  
Where the Sun-lovers slept.

So Wanda dreamed, and present things  
Were less than naught to him;  
Body and spirit barely knit,  
This life a background dim.

MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

Then came the hour when snapped the cord,  
And the lone spirit fled,  
With vision new to follow where  
His dreams of beauty led.

Once more he emulates the wind,  
And scans the forest aisle,  
Where wild bees haunt the honeyed bloom,  
And bright, quaint orchids smile.

And now he knows the God Who spoke  
In noonday's flooding gold,  
Or smote the hills with swords of flame,  
When crashing thunder rolled.

No more the evil things bewitch,  
Nor omens dark the morn!  
Dwelling where wisdom is the light,  
Black Wanda is reborn.

Note: The aboriginal boy here recalled lost his sight while in the service of Mr Strettle, on one of his stations. The affliction followed a fall from a horse. Hoping to give the young black an opportunity for education, his employer sent him to the school for the blind, but Wanda, broken-hearted at the loss of his sight, made no response, and died after a few months. Many years later, the manager at the Lake Tyers aborigines station told me that he had never known a black to live very long after becoming blind, and Sir Baldwin Spencer said the same of the Central Australian tribes. Like our poor Wanda they always died of a broken heart.

## Country Trips

Among the very fruitful experiences of my schooldays is a group which I cannot afford to pass over without special mention. As stated earlier, music became one of my chief studies; I had lessons in piano playing, and was taught singing and the violin, and shared in the activities of both choir and orchestra. Each year, for a season of perhaps three weeks, this body of musical students took a concert tour in some district of the country, stopping a night in the larger towns, and the week-end in the more important places. In advance it was arranged with some local resident to secure us lodging in the homes of the people, who cared for us and entertained us during our short stay. Our visits were generally a sensation for the community. We arrived in state, in our own railway carriage, which was shunted off on to a siding at each station where we halted; next we were marched up to the centre of the town, our brass band blaring lively tunes to stir up the quiet streets of the place; then we were handed over to the ladies and gentlemen who were to have us in safe keeping until the concert at night.

In almost every country hall of any size we warbled our songs and glees, and during the interval Mr Moss discoursed upon the work our institution was doing for the blind of this State. At the close of the programme there would be a sale of baskets, brushes, mats, and knitting, all made by the blind workers. Finally we were led off to our temporary homes by our gentle hosts or hostesses, to be handed over again at the railway station next day, when a repetition of proceedings would occur at the next stopping place.

Of course, these tours were a tremendous thrill to us. They provided a change of food, of surroundings, and of human

contacts, and we, who had the privilege of sharing in them by reason of our musical talent, were much envied by our poor stay-at-home mates.

My personal recollections of this trouping are growing fainter; nevertheless, some outstanding people and some quaint adventures have not gone with the years. So many kind souls received us as guests, that it is a pleasure to roam in those particular realms of memory; but naturally some personalities leave a more vivid impression than others, and the image lasts longer on that account.

On one occasion a girl mate and I were taken into a home ruled over by a charming old lady, with her daughter second in command. We youngsters were paraded through the streets and presently arrived at a comfortable cottage.

In a trice we were dumped into chairs, our hats removed, and before we could protest Mamma was washing my face with a flannel, and Amy was commanded to wash the other one. It was a merry moment for us, but we meekly submitted. Next we were led to the table in the dining-room, napkins tucked in round our necks, and our hostess said: "Now, Amy, you feed that one and I'll feed this."

This was too much for a couple of girls already apt to get the giggles; we had much ado to convince them that we could manage these simple operations for ourselves. I have often marvelled since then that the good people in those country towns, quite ignorant of the ways and needs of the blind, were willing to accept the responsibility of entertaining us, seeing they imagined there would be so much to do for us.

There are jokes from those country excursions too, which are still traditional among us. When we get together we still laugh over the tricks of the witty but naughty Walter, who, though a pupil of our school, was in possession of partial sight. He misled an old timer with the yarn that he could tell the color of a horse by the trot. The old boy sent the story flaming round the town, for had not Wally distinguished a



bay from a black horse on the road, and done many more miracles of the kind. He did not realise that the rascal could see enough for this purpose.

In most cases these hosts of ours were temporary, and soon became but a pleasant memory, but not all of them vanished when the railway train bore us away from the scene of the concert. I am glad to record here that, throughout the fifty years and more which have elapsed since my last country trip, I have often met again acquaintances of that generous period. Sometimes I am obliged to stir up the dregs of memory to place them, but in one case especially I made friendships of a lasting quality.

On a concert trip to Colac, when I was only a child of eleven, I was domiciled with Mr and Mrs Turner at their chemist shop. In their family were two daughters, Lily and Lou, and a son, Will. With these young people I was fortunate enough to establish a permanent friendship, fostered at a later date by a long holiday spent for health reasons in that beautiful home. After a time the family came to live in Melbourne and the intimacy grew. With the aid of similar ideals and a strong personal attraction Lily and I drew closer and closer together, and her sister was not far behind. Both of the sisters married: Lily is the wife of Mr F. W. Bond, for long a senior police magistrate in this city, and still a very energetic worker in many religious and philanthropic causes.

These two dear friends of mine spent most of their early married life in the country, and into their homes I often went as a friend and sister. They and their children have shown for me a constant affection and concern which one can expect only from blood relations. Their children, and the third generation as well, know me as aunt, and it is always my pleasure to share their joys and to lend a sympathetic ear to their cares and troubles.

Louie Turner married Mr Alf McClelland, and with this family my intimacy has been the same as with the Bonds;

the children, down to the third generation, bring me the delight of their affection and are often in my home, so that I feel proud of this loyal association of about sixty years.

Other old friends steal back to me from the past, whom I first discovered on a country trip of school days. Mr Edwin K. Beaumont, C.E., an engineer of note in connection with the building of the transcontinental railway, I met at Castlemaine, where I spent a week-end with his mother and sisters. Now and then, when he has been in Melbourne, he has looked me up for a yarn and a song, for old times' sake, and the sense of continuity in our mutual interests easily survives between these meetings.

But one adventure of those days must be recorded more fully, as I am very proud to have been the guest of so distinguished a person as Joseph Furphy, or Tom Collins, the non-de-plume by which he is better known. We had arrived in Shepparton by train, just in time to start our concert at eight o'clock, and were rushed up to the hall, changed into our stage frocks, and the performance went on right away. At the close of the programme my mate and I were handed over to someone named Furphy, and taken to his house for the night. I was very tired, and even now do not forget that I wanted to go to bed. Soon, however, we were seated at a table for supper, as there had been no time for tea. A gentleman with a rather sharp, brusque manner sat with us and did the honors. The first surprise he gave us was to bid us try eating cheese with plum cake. I objected, and he said: "Have you ever tried it?"

"No."

"Then, don't say that you do not like a thing until you have tried it first!"

I did try it, and found it good. Next he said: "I hear you want to be a scholar! What kind of a start have you made?" I did not know; in fact I was amazed, shy, puzzled, for I was still in my early teens.

"What do you read?" he asked. Books were very limited, but we had the Bible, and many of the plays of Shakespeare.

"I see! What story in the Bible do you like best?"

I told him that of The Prodigal Son.

"That will do," he remarked. "And now about Shakespeare? Which play do you like?"

The last I had read was "AS YOU LIKE IT," and I named that at once.

"Come on then; give me a bit out of it."

I started "The Seven Ages of Man," but had to be helped over a few slips or omissions. That ended, he began to recite, and gave me many fine selections, some familiar, and some quite unknown to me. Suddenly he stopped and said:

"Do you know that I write poetry?"

Actually I did not know, and in my shyness could only say that I did not remember.

"Now you do not know anything about it," he said teasingly. "Listen to this!" and he was off again.

I wish I could say that I heard him recite this or that poem from his own compositions, but the hour was early morning and I began to hear his voice through mists of Morpheus, so the lady of the house rescued me, and saw my dozing mate and my drooping self safely into bed.

I reckoned we had met a rather queer individual, and it was not until in later years I read his wonderful book, *Such Is Life*, that I realised the honor I had enjoyed, and that my host of that night in Shepparton was the famous contributor to Australia's literary treasury.

Often as I read him I recall his incisive questions, his playful teasing of a bashful young girl, and the delicious rolling of his words as he declaimed "Henry Before Agincourt," or described in Portia's words the qualities of mercy.

Another family whose acquaintance I made when on tour as a schoolgirl was that of the Thomases, of milling fame. I stayed in their mother's house at Murtoa, and met Elizabeth,

the daughter, a little younger than myself. But this family afterwards came to live in Moonee Ponds, where I had my home with my brother, and we met in church and public life so often that it can scarcely be claimed that any friendship with them was the result of an earlier meeting.

Many other of our hosts of those times I still remember, and some have passed on and some are forgotten; still they were a wonderful lot, taking us in, caring for us, and cheering us with every kindly device possible, and sending us on our way with little gifts and a sense of having been welcome while we sojourned with them.

## The Bitterness of Failure

Having negotiated the hurdle of the matriculation examination, I now wished to try for a degree at the Melbourne University. It was not expected that the Institute for the Blind could finance so costly a scheme, and such outlay was quite beyond the means of my family, but I had friends, and it was decided to appeal to the public for assistance. My small success was a news item at that date, resulting in considerable publicity through the Press, so the Austral Salon, the leading woman's club of Melbourne, took up the matter. A big matinee performance was arranged, at which some of the best artists and actors gave their services. My own excitement was so tremendous that much that happened has faded from my memory altogether; but I can recall the day of the entertainment, when I was led on to the stage by Mr Alfred Dampier and presented to the audience. I was just seventeen then, a much younger person at that time than is the young lady of seventeen now.

Clad in a white muslin dress, I clung to the hand of my friendly guide, and tried to make my bow in spite of extreme nervousness. The whole affair is a little misty, although two reminders of a material kind I still have in my possession, one a poem in my honor, written by Garnet Walch, the other a black and white portrait, by Fred Kneebone, which he gave to the Austral Salon, and which, later, was dispensed with and came into my hands through the good offices of my friend, Mrs Furlong. The poem will be found on another page.

From this entertainment a substantial sum was raised to start me on my scholastic career, and a tutor was sought to carry me on with my work. The lady chosen was Miss Mary



Doyle, a graduate of the Melbourne University, a woman of outstanding sweetness and gentleness. Later she became Mrs McKie, and mother of two sons who have reached distinction, one who held the post of city organist for Melbourne during a period, and the other a clergyman recently appointed to the charge of Christ Church, South Yarra.

This mother of gifted sons was a genuine scholar, but for some reason my studies did not prosper as well under her guidance as was expected. I do not know whether I took my gigantic task too lightly, or whether both teacher and pupil failed to realise the special difficulties confronting a blind student at that time. Our chief disability was the absence of text-books in Braille. Every single line had to be transcribed by hand; no maternal library existed then, whose self-devoting workers could help. I copied and copied through the weeks and the months at the dictation of my tutor, or of anyone else I might manage to co-opt; most of my time went in that arduous business. I got through the examinations for the first year of Arts, and some odd subjects for the second; then the strain proved too heavy for me, physically and mentally, and I was forced to give up, to accept the bitter disappointment of my failure, more terrible perhaps because I had unwillingly betrayed the confidence of my sponsors.

I am afraid, also, that it hurt my tutor sorely, for I never met her again after the expiration of her contract as my teacher. She married, and I dare say her new life held plenty of obligations, as she went to a suburban vicarage.

Prior to this date Mr Moss had died, and mother had taken me home to live with my family. Without definite work or plans I fretted for about a year. My health, never robust, gave us much anxiety, and it seemed probable that I might go into a decline. At this juncture an invitation to pay the Turners a visit at Colac came most opportunely, and I was at once despatched by train in the hope that a change would restore me.

It will be remembered that Mr Turner was the chemist and druggist for the wide and wealthy district around the town, and in those times most of the men who followed this business were very wise in more matters than dispensing drugs. Mr Turner had learned of a cure for tender lungs and at once introduced it to me. Under this treatment, and with the good care of his wife, and the happy surroundings the home provided, I gradually regained both health and spirits. The improvement continued after my return to Melbourne, and I can never be too grateful to these generous friends for all the love they have given me, and possibly their gifts may include my very life.

From that time I began to long for work, for an object to aim at, both of which came in due course. I want to state, however, that throughout the years that have elapsed since that failure I have not allowed my powers to rust. Always I have been occupied with some study, some plan of reading, some effort to build up my mind and acquire knowledge, so that I should be, though outside universities and colleges, without degrees or diplomas, a well-educated woman. Thus I have striven to use what ability I have to the best advantage, and I trust that my premiere in non-success has been wiped out by the efforts I have put forth in the realm of citizenship in my later days. I humbly believe that the Light besought by the poet in the following lines has not been denied me.

### LET THERE BE LIGHT

Opening ode, written by Garnet Walch, and delivered by Mr Alfred Dampier at the Benefit Matinee tendered to blind girl, Miss Tilly Aston, Bijou Theatre, Saturday, 4th April, 1891:

Let there be Light! And o'er the waiting world  
The lucent tide in radiant splendor flowed;

Color and form their banners brave unfurled,  
 And decked with lavish hand man's first abode.  
 Sunrise and Sunset stained or east or west,  
 The golden noontide burned upon the lea;  
 But ah! Their beauty passed, unknown, unblest  
 By some sad eyes, the eyes that could not see.

Let there be Light! So every dawning day  
 Repeats the miracle of long ago,  
 As coursers chase the night away,  
 And all the heavens in painted glory glow!  
 Yet, 'midst Aurora's triumphs, rainbow-hued,  
 When at her smile the ebon forces flee,  
 One formless shadow must forever brood  
 On those sad eyes, the eyes that cannot see.

Let there be Light! The Light that fills the soul,  
 That floods the mind, that sparkles on the lips,  
 The light of knowledge, spread from Pole to Pole,  
 A sun that sets not, suffers no eclipse!  
 This quenchless light your sympathy ensures  
 To one sweet maid, who thanks you, Friends,  
 through me!  
 And thus with happy years and deeds like ours  
 They shall not weep, those eyes that cannot see.

## Affairs of the Heart, Serious and Otherwise

Generally speaking, no story of a human life gives satisfaction, at least to the younger feminine reader, does it not contain some indication of the person's response to the emotions of love for the opposite sex. Although I am convinced that love is a matter which concerns the two people between whom it has sprung up, I quite agree that its repercussions on every other aspect of life, its developmental value on general character, and its effects on those around us, are important enough to warrant that universal interest shown in lovers everywhere and at all times. So I venture a few paragraphs, since I did not escape the common lot in this.

I have a secret chamber in my heart, where the hand of time has hung a few pictures in this relation, and thither I go, a little pensively at times, but mostly in a spirit of kindly amusement, to meet the amorous laddies who once made me happy or sad.

I need not say that to the blind is just as certain to come the touch of those passions and desires as to the younger portion of humanity in general; but with the sightless the consummation in marriage is somewhat rarer, since most people are cowards where public opinion has to be defied. Beyond question, the majority is critical when such a union takes place. Only a few weeks ago a woman friend came groaning to me about a dreadful thing that had happened to the daughter of her neighbour: "Doris," she wailed, "is going to marry a blind man! Don't you think it dreadful?"

I did not and said so, and also added some further comments, which would have rejoiced the heart of Doris had she heard them. Ah well, education is very slow in most peoples,

unless we recall the wonderful experiments of Jimmy Yen, in his home land of China.

But let me lift the shutter of my own little chamber—easily done now that I am past the years of hope or fear. First there was Jack, a boy in my class at school. Right under the nose of the teacher he would manage to slip amorous notes into my desk, commencing “My Beloved Venus,” and signed, “Yours forever, ‘The Comet’.” You see how wise we were; nothing in superscription and signature to betray us to vigilant authority! Were there love-gifts? Certainly desirable lengths of string, battered violets, purloined, I fear, from the forbidden garden of the superintendent; finally, the engagement ring of silver, embossed with a heart and hand, was given and accepted. Now, I do not recall how this engagement was terminated, but the ring was never returned to the lover. It lay in a spare purse at my mother’s home, until a burglar got in and cleaned up all my small treasures, the ring among the rest.

As years went on other boys appeared in the field. The young schoolmaster was very charming, likewise the music-master, each of whom caused a flutter in my teen-age heart.

Then I began to get into the papers, and Rowland, a young Englishman, saw my picture somewhere and wrote that he thought I would suit him for a wife, but nothing came of that, and I wandered on through the meadows of maidenhood.

Several of my blind comrades proposed to me, but, although I have seen some very successful marriages between two blind people, resulting in good homes and capable children who are now fine citizens, I felt that this way would not suit me. I wanted a protector, a helper, one who could help to make life worthwhile, a task which seemed beyond a man with the same handicap as myself. So these chances resulted in nothing.

Many years later mother was approached with a proposal for my hand. The suitor was an elderly Lancashire man, a tinsmith by trade. He put it to mamma in this way: “Ah



wouldn't mahnd a respectable blahnd woman, and ah want to get married!" He sent me the gift of a beautiful washing-up dish, a sâmples of his skill in the trade. Mother was angry, and I was amused; and naturally, nothing came of that either, save the useful bowl, and the necessity for me to take another route when I made my shopping excursions, since I did not wish to meet the old boy.

Returning to my late 'teens and early twenties, I recall another flame or two. There was James, who thought we might between us make a good thing if we went on tour as a concert party. He was a musician, and so was I; but I had been brought up in a blue-ribbon family of ultra Puritan views, and James rarely hove in sight—or smell—without an overwhelming odour of liquor. So that was soon over, and James went his way.

Charlie was one of my queerest admirers. He was a gardener, and posies flowed freely from his generous hand. He was wont to boast to others that we would be married, that he was buying the ring, and looking out for a house; but not once did he attempt to put the vital question, nor was I aware of any deep attachment on his side. Suddenly he left for South Africa, where he died, and it was only after his death that I learned of his statements among our friends in regard to this matter, and of the supposition that I had turned him down.

The two men who had the greatest influence on my earlier life also came before I was twenty-one. Both failed me. In each case I received enough attention to engender serious hopes; there were flowers, music, concerts, and such little sweets of youth in love. In the first case the jolt came from the boy's mother. She invited me to tea when her son was absent working late. She behaved so affectionately to me, and, leading up to the subject of her son, she remarked, "Oh, yes, and he is so fond of you, dear! But of course, he would never marry a blind girl! You quite understand that!"

I had not the poise at that time to handle such a woman, and I went home wretched and hurt, especially as the son did not show up as promised to bring me home. I talked it over with my folk, and the opinion was that the young man was in the conspiracy, and had left it to his mother to settle the matter with me. He came to see me once again, but his reception was far from cordial, and he did not try it a second time, and our intimacy was never renewed.

In due time the other admirer was admitted to my inner self. He loved all the girls, but I really thought he loved his "Little Tilly" best. The affair flourished, and, as he worked and lived in a distant town, he learned Braille, and letters passed always twice a week. Then suddenly the letters stopped, nor did he drop in as often happened when business brought him to town. For a time I waited and wondered, and then I wrote, asking what was wrong. His reply was that he was busy, very much engaged, lots of things going on. I must not expect too much, although he would always be glad to hear from me. This letter was a shock, inducing something that resembled shame in me, for evidently I had been misleading myself, by thinking that I had, as a blind woman, any chance of winning the strong, uplifting love of a good man. Had I been stupid and vain? Once more the contempt of the other man's mother came to me with added bitterness, for I had expected too much. I had believed that love would stop at nothing, not even the condemnation of kindred and society.

So I sat down to do some hard thinking on the affairs of Cupid. These last two had disappointed me. I tried to believe that I had mistaken their feelings, but could not, and finally I accepted the fact that very few of us can stand up against public opinion in such matters, and I had indeed expected too much. Well, it was over, and never again would I allow such a thing to happen, for the sake of my own happiness and the trust I must have in my fellows.

I determined after that to fill my life with interests and ambitions, and with service for others where I could find a niche. By degrees this all came to me, and I grew happy in watching the love of others. Throughout the years I have had the young coming to me with their wonder stories, their tiffs and reconciliations, their weddings, babies, and homes, and even the problems and triumphs of their children's education. I have found scope for my mother-love without having held a child of my own. The lovely dreams of my youth have been realised, but not as some people would imagine. I have always had splendid men as friends; to me they have been kind and chivalrous, without a thought for my femininity, and they have served me and the cause I love, with constancy and care.

The needs of the blind of this State soon captured my interest and devotion, and the story of that work will be told later in this volume.

There is yet one other sentimental adventure which I think worth mentioning, as it was of a totally different kind from those I have described. Early in this century, Dr Zamenhof published his most beautiful international auxiliary language, Esperanto, and I became completely fascinated by its sweetness and possibilities. I mastered it from text-books, and it was not long before I had an extensive correspondence in all parts of the world. Among the letter-friends was a man, resident in the United States of America—Usono, as we Esperantists call it—who was suffering from recent bereavement by the death of his wife, and in need of mental diversion. He was a violinist, and a very successful bandmaster; Sousa was his friend, and often helped him with his arrangements of music for his bands. He was also a Spanish scholar, and took a most intelligent interest in world affairs.

We launched out on a regular interchange of letters, and this lasted for about thirty years, until his death a year or so back. Gradually we became more intimate, as our respec-

tive modes of life were revealed to each other, and, although we never met, his epistles developed into actual love-letters of a very beautiful and innocent type, in themselves fine examples of that type of literary art. At first I laughed at them, and then my conscience began to stir, because I had not definitely cut them out.

One day a letter in the usual strain arrived when I had a niece visiting me, and I broke forth with the declaration that this sort of thing must stop. "What must stop, aunt?" I explained. Her merriment over, it was rather irritating. "Why, auntie," she cried, "don't you see what fun he is getting out of just writing those letters to you? It would break him up if you put an end to his literary effusions like that! You let him alone if he wants to blow off on you! He is thousands of miles away, and it won't do you any harm. Why shouldn't the old fogies have a bit of fun if they like a game like that!"

Oh, these wise and experienced young women of this new generation! So the correspondence went on. I got my love-letters, but there was neither proposal nor pledge, and I got his last message when I received the local paper from over there, giving an account of his very touching funeral. His children still write to me, and it is a pleasant contact, since I had grown to know them through their father, and to feel an extra friendly interest in their doings.

After all these little confidences, I trust that no one will pity me for my mishaps in the game of love. Surely it is evident that I am a truly gay old maid, and an outstanding proof of the lines of Tennyson, where he says:

" 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to  
have loved at all."

A VOICE BELOVED

Over my soul there broke one day  
 The tender tones of a voice that thrilled;  
 'Twas like to the wind at break of day,  
 And soft as the murmur of the bay,  
 When other sounds were stilled.

Never before had reached my ear  
 Such music laden with love and power!  
 The tremulous sweetness drew me near,  
 And lighted the torch that still burns clear  
 Each dark and lonely hour.

And e'en through the years that come and go,  
 The voice beloved is with me yet,  
 Too dear for my soul to let it go.  
 No rapture as rich on Earth I know!  
 O glory of blest youth's after-glow,  
 Unmarred by a vain regret.

A little story has occurred to me as possibly serving as a much shrewder explanation of the manner in which love's young dream forsook me quite early in life, so I append it as the concluding word on this theme.

In the early years of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, we discovered an aged man who had lost his sight, and was very unhappy. He had been a compositor in the office of the Melbourne *Punch*, and loved reading above all things; so I persuaded him to learn to read by Braille, and helped a little by posting him a letter in that system every week. Naturally, Mr Whitaker and I became very good friends, and the old gentleman never failed to sing my praise at all times and all places.

One time an unfounded rumour reached him that I was contemplating marriage. This was very upsetting to him, and



he grumbled away to one and another, as I heard afterwards, although he said nothing to me about it. At last he opened up the subject with a mutual friend, and his final dictum was this: "We shall have to stop it! No one man must be allowed to monopolise her; she belongs to all of us blind people."

And perhaps Mr Whitaker was, as the issue has proved, quite right.

## Setting Out in Life

Having disposed of the lighter matters of the foregoing chapter, it is time to get back to more serious affairs. When I had recovered from the sickness and sorrow of my great failure, I recognised the necessity of finding a channel by which I could provide a livelihood for myself.

This was not due to any family pressure, for Steve was anxious that I should share his home with my mother, and just enjoy myself at his expense. Such a life had never been my ideal, and I had grown up in the conviction that for blind people, as for their sighted neighbours, independence was the best original equipment for citizenship. So I examined my own prospects, which were not very bright.

I had hoped to teach in school, but the determined opposition to the blind teacher from the management of my old school made an appointment there unlikely.

But I was open to engagement as tutor for any blind child whose parents were unwilling to send it to a charitable institution, and, in due time, I found such a pupil.

This was Lilian, daughter of Mr Charles Churchill, an Englishman who was in Melbourne with his family for a few years in connection with some business. Later they returned to London, but Lilian still writes to me after more than forty years.

In the meantime I also advertised as a teacher of singing and music. In this line I always had some work; but the fluctuations in this calling are well known to every mediocre practitioner, and I had my ups and downs as well as the rest of them. Still, it kept me in a meagre way, and as I was living with my own folk, there was never any shortage of the essentials for reasonable comfort. I helped

with the household duties, and thus acquired a complete knowledge of house-keeping, from plain cooking to the chores at the wash-tub. There was plenty of fun in overcoming little problems, too. For instance, I sometimes over-blued the white clothes, and suffered the disapproval of my superior officer; later I learned to measure so many gallons of water to a knob of blue, well mix, and thereafter all went well. In cooking there were some chances, as thermometric stoves were unknown at that period, but I got on fairly well and could get a dinner, or bake a tray of scones. During the thirty years since I made my own home, those duties have been relegated to my housekeepers, and I may have lost my skill through want of practice, yet I always find home-making a topic of interest when I meet my women friends to whom it is the chief topic.

Next, I began to take trips in the streets unattended. At first this gave much anxiety at home, until I declared my intention to rebel, and after that I went alone where I would. In those days traffic was not so intense, and I roamed from one end of Melbourne to the other, out on country trips, and even as far as Sydney to visit my cousins. No fear assailed me then, and the public, the marvellous public, always lent a hand, as it still does, when we need it.

Another activity which absorbed a good deal of my time was the Church. I had joined the Punt Road Prahran Methodists while still at school, and now we all went there to worship. I joined the choir, took a girls' class in the Sunday-school, and made friends among the people there.

It was in this sphere that I fully grasped the truth that only in service does real development take place. I continued to take active part in religious work for thirty years, until the condition of my health broke that thread, since which time I have remained on the retired list, save for an occasional appearance as preacher at a women's service, or as a speaker at friendly guild meetings, where I could tell

a helpful story or do a little homely preaching on my own account.

But I must get back to my early twenties. It may seem strange to the sighted reader that, amid all this love at home, friendship at the church, pupils and other outlets, I should not be satisfied. I missed the blind world and, with very few exceptions, found that other blind were like myself, living apart from each other, often practical prisoners, because their families thought that food, clothing and shelter should be the sum of life for the blind. Soon I began to feel that something must be done about it, but what I could not decide. I was just twenty, inexperienced and poor, with my living to earn, and a sense of defeat still holding me down. I scarcely think I had any definite plans, though I knew the best was not being done for the blind. Further, I had been reading a little of what was going forward in other lands to help the sightless, and there were many streams of light flowing that had not burst forth on this side of the world. With my mind thus full of longings to help, I taught music, went on a concert tour in Tasmania, and came home again, convinced that I was not a trouper at heart, and must have a settled place in which to dwell. Then my first call came, the story of which is given in my next Chapter.

DEFEAT

*Originally published in "Singable Songs"*

When Circumstance, that Monster unrelenting,  
Shall stand with club upraised;  
Is Man to bow, nor think of circumventing,  
Nor lift a hand, the deadly blow preventing,  
Like one by terror dazed.

The heart cries, "Never! Let him go down fighting,  
Or let him subtle grow!

T'is his to dodge, recoil, the danger slighting,  
Or cunningly the onset fierce inviting,  
To thrust aside the blow.

"But let the tyrant with his fears defeat you,  
A shattered thing you lie.

He'll never pass that way but he will greet you  
With boast insulting, how he once did beat you,  
Till even hope will die."



## Origin of the Braille Library in 1894

As will have been learned from a previous record, I had aimed at winning an Arts Degree at the Melbourne University. For a year or two I had battled on with my studies, getting safely through the first year of my course, and some odd examinations towards the next stage. But the difficulties encountered were tremendous, the chief one being the absence of text-books in Braille. Of course, in some subjects these could be read aloud, such as logic, philosophy and English literature; but I doubt if any student could master a complete course in mathematics and languages without the text in full before him. So I struggled on, with any odd friend to dictate while I copied, and it may be imagined what a hopeless task I had undertaken. I failed to get the coveted B.A. degree, and had to swallow my disappointment as best I could.

At that time I was intimate with a family named Blakely, in which was a blind brother, David, a school-mate of mine. One day, when I was unburdening my sorrows to Mary, his sister, and lamenting my special handicaps about text-books, she said, "What a pity some of us didn't know in time! We could have learned Braille, and transcribed some of the books for you."

I then told her that in England, libraries for the blind were being formed of hand-copied volumes written by devoted Braille transcribers. Printing for the blind was, and is still, very costly, so that only very popular or necessary books could be printed; hence, the hand-made production was the one means of getting a library together. I wondered if there would be any chance of starting such a movement in Melbourne, and Miss Blakely offered to help me if a way could be found.

The first opening came when she was invited to read a paper at the monthly meeting of the Stenographers' Association. I had all the material required—the story of Louis Braille, the inventor of the system, particulars of the movement to build up libraries of hand-written books in Britain and, naturally, I was myself an expert in Braille. So we got together and prepared the paper, and Miss Blakely read it at the meeting, while I was present to give a demonstration. In the audience was Mrs D. Harrison, wife of the confidential clerk in the legal firm in which Miss Blakely also served as stenographer. Mrs Harrison at once grew deeply interested in the idea, and offered to learn Braille, and to copy books. She invited Miss Blakely and myself to visit her, and we were soon busy with lessons.

I am not absolutely certain about the first book completed, but I think it was *The Cricket on the Hearth*; at any rate, it was one of the shorter works of Dickens, and others followed very quickly. Mr and Mrs Harrison opened their home at 2 Charlotte Place, St Kilda, to the work, and it was arranged that I should go there for the day each Wednesday, to meet the pupils and correct their exercises. This work I continued for a considerable time, and the band of workers grew.

All persons do not leave the same clear impress on the memory, but I recall from those days Miss Mary Forrest, Mrs Rodda and Miss Prentice, who did a good deal of copying, and Messrs Molloy, Mitchell, Leggo, and our beloved social president of a few years ago, Mr W. H. MacLennan, all of whom with Mr W. R. Church, helped with the administration or in the raising of money. One of the first whose exercises I corrected was Miss Blyth, who is still doing a bit at writing, although over ninety. These, and others, would come to the house of Mrs Harrison, bringing work which, when fit to be bound, I prepared for new volumes.

Thither also came the first blind readers, as a few books were ready for lending. Among them were Will Hall, Charlie

Taylor, Joe Walker, Dick Primal, Tom Marks, and Dave and Janie Robertson. These blind folk would come along every Wednesday evening, and the dry jokes of Dave Blakely would add to the social nature of the gatherings, while volumes were sorted out and parcelled up, and blind world gossip exchanged.

But Braille books are very bulky, and it soon became evident that another home must be provided for the collection, and also money to meet the heavy cost of paper and binding. The still young Australian Natives Association was approached and its council took up the matter with enthusiasm. The various branches organised meetings in the city and suburbs, gaining for the movement both publicity and funds. At these gatherings I took part as a demonstrator and singer, coming in contact with most of the leading musical artists of that time. I especially recall the kindly charm of Rosena Palmer, the rather stately manners of Armes Beaumont, never, I may say, cold or repellant; there was Maggie Stirling, Ada Crossley, Mr Gee, good old Will Elder, with his humorous recitals so dear to us all. How I enjoyed those fine performers, as they gave to our rising library this magnificent gift of their talent. Thus we got ourselves known, and the number of volumes increased.

I cannot omit mention of another friend we made at this time, Mr Thomas Luxton, father of the families now holding distinction among us. He was mayor of Prahran, and we never asked for any help he could give without receiving it immediately. In due time we were able to rent a large room in The Block, Collins Street, Melbourne, in which all business of an executive kind was done, and from whence circulated the books to a fast growing list of readers all over the State of Victoria. Mrs Harrison was still honorary secretary, a post which she held till her death eighteen years after the founding of the library. The later history of this movement is well known, and I presume there are plenty of records from which

to draw information. Soon after the removal of the work to the city, circumstances caused a break in my connection with the Association of Braille-Writers, and since then I have had no official link with it but unofficially I have always been available when there was a little job I could do.

One outstanding occasion of this kind I recall with great satisfaction. For a long time the Edward Wilson Trustees had been considering whether they would give us a library building for ourselves, which could house the books and office, and afford a social centre for the readers. Some pressure to dissuade them from this course had been put forward by the management of The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, and it was the opinion of that body that this special department of work for the blind should pass into their hands. A conference with the Trustees was ultimately arranged at the home of Mr Murray Smith, and I was there to speak on behalf of the readers. I pleaded for our recreations to be kept right away from the atmosphere of our work; how we had found in the library a happy personal touch that could not be attained in an institution controlling both education and the daily bread question for so many of us. Well, we got our way, and I think my intercession had much to do with it. The fine building in Commercial Road, South Yarra, was the result, and on the day of the opening I had the honor to receive the key from the late Sir George Fairbairn, who was one of the Wilson Trustees at the time, and to whom I gave the assurance that it would never be used to lock out any of the blind.

It just remains for me to say about this subject one very pleasant thing. That sympathetic personal touch, which has made the relations of readers and staff of the library so kindly and constant, right on through the period of Miss Millicent Ritchie, M.B.E. and Miss Minnie Crabb, has never waned; and to one who has experienced many phases of philanthropic and charitable work, the prayer arises in my

## MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

heart that it may ever be thus, and that the true humanitarian may always hold the reins in this special sphere, remembering that the blind, though handicapped in body, are not handicapped in spirit.

This chapter was written during the week preceding the great jubilee gathering at the library, 25 March 1944. On that evening I delivered a speech, which was an abridgement of this chapter.



## Explanatory

Before proceeding to give the details of the next important activity of my younger days, it seems advisable to insert here a brief explanation of the blind world situation at the time in this part of the world. In 1866 some public-spirited citizens of Prahran had felt the need of an Institution for the Blind; so it was founded in that year, and was known as The Asylum and School for the Blind, a title which it retained until the early 'nineties. Recalling the scope of the Institution when I entered it for education in 1882, I find that it consisted of a school for the children, in which the curriculum was embryonic, but slowly improving.

No inmate was received there after school age, so that a person losing his vision from sixteen years and upwards was not able to benefit by the instruction given. One or two exceptions may have occurred, but the limit of age was the general and constantly practised rule.

As the children came out of the school-room, training was begun for a life programme. Where there was musical ability it was developed, and some fine teachers and church organists were turned out. Some of the pupils, of course, returned to their families, to take a share in the work of the home, or assist in other common interests. The rest stayed on, some to learn the trades of mat making, brush and broom work, and heavier basketry, and generally, when trained, these were employed in the Institution workshops. They lived in, together with a few unemployable cases, so that, altogether about two hundred of our one thousand blind were under the care of this Asylum and School.

Such a policy was not altogether out of keeping with the times. Workers received a nominal gratuity in money, and

free board and lodging. Then as numbers increased, it was found advisable to make journeymen of the best workers, and they were boarded with their own people, or in other suitable homes near by. This order continued till about 1892, when it was decided to change the policy. The name of the Institution had already been altered to The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, and it was no longer an asylum, but a school, from which the pupils graduated to musical studies, or into the workshops.

It would have been easy at that time to liberalise the policy, so as to admit the young adult blind to enter for training and employment; but it was not done, and out of this narrow view of its obligations, the determination to hold to the out-of-date programme, came much suffering to those for whom the organisation existed.

This sorely needed change did not take place until some years after the founding of The Association for the Advancement of the Blind. At that time I went to the Government on a deputation to ask financial aid for our blind home at Brighton Beach, and at the Treasury I found Mr W. A. Watt, an old friend of mine. He had married as his first wife a dear girl I had known, but after her death we had not been much in contact with each other. Perhaps he was more inclined to listen to me on account of this former acquaintance, but he did not agree to help us from the public funds. I may say here that throughout the forty-nine years of the growing activities of my brotherhood of the blind, not one penny of Government money has aided us in financing the work.

Mr Watt was astonished, however, at the limitations of the work being done at the old Institution, and he was for forcing their hands in the matter. I have a faint idea that there were some warm passages between the management and the State Treasurer, although I know little about it, save that there was actually a slight change of heart, and by degrees a few young adults were rescued from enforced mendicancy, which had

been the only shameful means of living left to many heretofore. These were placed in the workshops, but still the vast majority of the sightless remained unhelped, uncomforted, unless their fellow blind could reach them. Most of them had no social life, few friends, practically no encouragement to help themselves, and these facts should explain the motives which induced me to rouse my fellow-blind, and form them into my brotherhood, The Association for the Advancement of the Blind, which has put forth through half a century its strenuous efforts to improve the status of our group, and to offer intercourse, happiness and hope to so many who were missing them all.

## Early Days of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind

When the work of providing books for the blind had been started, it was soon apparent that other needs were very pressing. To begin with, our blind were so scattered that only a very small proportion could be located. Then, the taste for reading had not been developed to any extent, disabilities when travelling annoyed and inconvenienced us, the right to vote at elections was often refused us because we were not able to use pen and ink, and many other grievances added to the difficulties of our handicap. Something had to be done to alter these conditions, and I realised at the same time that no one but the blind themselves could handle such matters in the proper spirit.

At that period I was living with my people in Nicholson Street, South Yarra, and a few of my companions, chiefly those I had known at school, were wont to drop in for a chat. One night a few of us got together for a solid discussion of our grievances in mother's parlour. I cannot name them all, but Will Hall and Charlie Taylor were there and most likely Dave Blakely and Katie McDougall. After much talk I agreed to summon a meeting for the purpose of starting a literary and debating club for the blind, from which it was hoped that something wider and more practical would grow.

I regret that memory does not serve me well enough to give all particulars of the origin of the movement, and unfortunately the minutes of the first ten years of our work were left in the train and never recovered. However, I feel certain, after conferring with Mr Dave Robertson, that the following facts are a fragment of the history of our beginnings.

My home was not big enough to hold the number we expected for this first meeting, and Miss Blakely's mother let us have the use of her parlor for the occasion. Only eight of the blind answered my summons. There were present Mr Dave Robertson and his sister, Dave Blakely, George Cobain, and Tom Marks, myself and two others of whom I cannot be positively certain. Messrs Hall and Taylor wished to be there but were prevented by more urgent duties. So we had our meeting, and my idea of a literary club, though desirable as part of our programme, was shown to be inadequate.

We elected Mr Robertson as our first president. I took the position of secretary and treasurer, and we set out on that enterprise which has culminated in our powerful organisation, in a vast improvement of conditions for the blind, and in a development of citizenship which has come to our people through giving their time and ability to the service of others—their fellow-blind.

At first my duties as treasurer were not onerous. Members paid a shilling to enter and a shilling a year after that. Therefore, I began with eight shillings, and that soon went in postage as I tried to round up the scattered ranks. Soon we were obliged to find a new meeting place, and through the interest of Miss Kate McDougall we were granted the use of the Church Hall at the Presbyterian Church, Punt Road, South Yarra. For many years we enjoyed this privilege and I recall it with gratitude for our members grew in numbers and so did our work grow in proportion. Later it was felt that a more central meeting place was advisable, because our members must travel from all parts of Melbourne and Suburbs, and in those days street services and rail travel were meagre compared with those of the present day.

Among the first jobs we tackled was the keeping of a register of the names and addresses of all the blind we could find. I obtained the census figures for the State, and found that there were one thousand and ninety-seven sightless persons



in our community, at least, that was the number recorded. Of this number we knew the whereabouts of only about one-fourth, so I wrote to country clergymen and school-masters, asking them to send names and addresses of any blind, old or young, living in their districts. Very few were the answers we received and some wrote that there were no cases of blind in their locality. Later, we learned that this information was not reliable, which could be explained by the fact that so many of these handicapped people lived in their homes like birds in a cage, and that even neighbours were scarcely aware of their existence.

For the city we adopted a different plan. Miss Janie Robertson, sister of our first president, offered to devote some days a week to finding out and visiting our people. This was purely a work of love, and I doubt whether she got as much as her fares for her arduous work. This was a splendid move and we still have our register of the blind of this State, and our visiting system is one of our most important activities, carrying comfort, information, instruction, or financial aid where necessary to the lonely ones, too old or too sick to share in other privileges we have provided for the rest. The Robertson brother and sister are still with us at the time of writing, October 1944, and are still high in the list of my friends who, through all the ups and downs of my leadership of the Association, have proved loyal-hearted, earnest and sound in both judgment and principles.

It is not my purpose in this book to give a complete history of The Association for the Advancement of the Blind, as that would be a long story. As the years flew, however, our cares and labors increased and also our achievements. We had the Immigration Law so regulated that we could now travel from State to State without the humiliating scenes at train or boat which had annoyed us and our friends; the anomalies in voting were corrected, the disability of having to pay for oneself and attendant when travelling was alleviated by travelling

rebates and concessions which we secured, and perhaps the greatest boon of all we obtained was free postage for embossed literature within the Commonwealth. Of course, there was the raising of funds, for we soon found that money must be got if we were to meet our growing responsibilities. In this department we knew that the help of sighted friends was indispensable. I wish I could name them all, but a few must be mentioned, as they were outstanding in their generous aid, asking neither honor nor power for themselves, desiring only that we blind people should have a chance to serve and uplift our fellows and in so doing, to uplift ourselves.

First, and last too, as he is still with us and still our devoted friend, is Mr W. H. Paterson, lately senior Deputy Registrar General and senior Assistant Registrar of Titles for this State. Four years before the starting of our organisation, while he was still little more than a youth, he arranged an annual social gathering which we knew as "Miss Thorne's Treat for the Blind", so that his active service is actually longer than my own. When we began to expand our work he came in with us, bringing his tolerant spirit and his tenacious purpose to our cause. He always believed that the blind could do it themselves and wanted only to help us around stiff corners. What our movement owes to him can never be told, but his friendship is to me a personal treasure, to which he has added that of his sweet wife, just as enthusiastic for our independence as her husband had always been.

Another friend in our beginnings was Dr S. MacBurney, a gentleman of great charm and kindness, always interested in the welfare of the blind, and most approachable, as was also his wife. He was a doctor of music and lent us his help in getting up concerts, and became a trustee, as soon as we had enough assets to need such an official.

A third and wonderful friend we made was Mr Charles Monteath, of the South Melbourne firm of iron founders of that name. This gentleman was attracted to our work through

an old sea-captain in whom he was interested. The man of the sea had gone blind and, hearing of our efforts to rehabilitate such cases, Mr Monteath brought him to see me, and I soon had him learning Braille and anxious to do something to help himself. Mr. Monteath was so pleased over the restored happiness of Captain Watson that he came in with us, and was a most understanding helper. His business associations brought us many gifts and subscribers which we should have missed without him. He worked with us until failing health forced him to withdraw, and his cheery Scotch voice still lingers in my memory whenever I think of those early days of the A.A.B.

Another friend of those days I commemorate here. He was George Maxwell. A son of the Punt Road Manse, he was always kind to the blind about his district, even while in his student years. Then, when he became a lawyer, he gave freely of his special talents both to the individuals and to our Association as soon as we began to buy land, or enter into contracts and agreements. With his rise to power he never became too exalted to lend a hand and his influence on behalf of our cause as member of the Federal Parliament won us several privileges. Blindness overtook him at about the age of fifty-four, and then he was indeed "One of Us". For some years he held office as our president, and paid his footing there by his efforts to secure more advantageous conditions in the matter of invalid pensions.

To me personally he was always most cordial, and a good sound yarn always marked our meetings. Indeed, he was my friend, as well as a staunch supporter of the cause I had espoused on behalf of the blind, and his splendid courage in facing the handicap of blindness was always a marvel to me.

There is still another I cannot leave out of this record. It was Miss Elsie Tait, also from the South Yarra Manse. She joined up with us at the time we were meeting in the Church Hall at her home, and for long years acted as our sighted

assistant secretary. In due time she married Herbert Lawrence, one of the finest of our blind men, and after his death continued to be one of our most faithful helpers.

Still, when there is sickness in any of the homes of our people, if a helping hand is needed at a social gathering, if someone is lonely or sad, or must make trips to doctor or hospital, a call for Mrs Lawrence brings the dear efficient woman to share the burdens and straighten out the tangles. Such precious souls as hers are a gift of God, for which I at least am devoutly thankful.

For nine years I served as honorary secretary and treasurer, and by the end of this period we had an office in Oxford Chambers and our meetings at the Assembly Hall, Little Collins Street, Melbourne. I was beginning to find the strain of the work rather heavy especially as the advancing years of my mother, increasing home responsibilities and my bread-and-butter job as a music-teacher made great demands on my energy. So we decided to appoint a secretary at a very low salary and Mr T. Marks was installed in the office.

The members wished me to retain my leadership in some form and duly elected me as president. Our enterprises went on as before as we played the part of watch-dog over the interests of the blind in every sphere that presented itself. Rail, tram and travelling concessions, the administration of relief where needed, visiting work, and much besides. Then came our biggest effort so far, the opening of the home at Brighton Beach, a need for which had been pressed upon us by the deplorable conditions our field workers discovered in some of the cases under their care.

Mr Paterson was a tower of strength to us in this emergency; it was he who found the house at Mair Street, put through the negotiations for purchase and organised a carnival at the Glaciarium, which brought in funds that were devoted to the costs. Many helped us to furnish and as soon as we were ready, we began to gather there, homeless ones, those



who were unwanted by their relatives, some who needed rest and recuperation. Great numbers have passed through this place of rest, finding shelter from adversity, and that kindly attention so desirable in the final hours of life. Looking back over the thirty-five years that have gone since the founding of this Home, I feel that it was an inspired thought which originated it, and I am certain that many of those who have used this Home will say the same thing.

Free postage of embossed literature was obtained for us chiefly through the good offices of Mr Frank Tudor, M.H.R. Two of our most energetic blind members, Messrs Holgate and Barber, lived in his electorate, and captured his interest in our efforts to relieve ourselves of some of our disabilities. This gentleman, after consultation with our committee, got the concession embodied in a small private Bill, which was shortly afterwards made law by Parliament. Only those who know the bulk and weight of our books and magazines can appreciate the enormous value of this privilege, and I hold that through it we have made a vast contribution to the education and culture of our blind, and at the same time to the nation at large.

Mr Tudor was one of the friendliest of men and was wont to join us at our picnics and socials where he learned to recognise our needs and our aspirations. For his fine gift of free postage eternal gratitude is due. Mr. Tudor brought another friend into our circle, Mr. Robert Solly, also a Parliamentary Representative. Bob Solly, as most people called him, was one of the easiest to get on with, and was on the committee of our Brighton Home for a considerable period. He was so reasonable and so understanding of our ways of thinking that all the blind liked him. It is a happy experience to have known him; but for that matter those were happy days, full of enterprise and hopeful toil, bringing alleviations for my handicapped family. So things moved on harmoniously until about the year nineteen hundred and twelve.



BROTHERHOOD

True Brotherhood can never lie  
In pity's mild and tender eye;  
For pity stoops from heights above,  
And condescends a mede of love  
To pour upon the hearts below  
That waste and suffer in their woe.

There is no brotherhood in him  
Who only scans the orbit dim  
Of lower planes in human life,  
And holds himself above the strife  
That moulds all human destiny  
And powers of posterity.

It is no brother's part to stand  
With eye serene and nerveless hand,  
While men of courage sweat and fight  
In the defence of what is right:  
Nay! If you cannot say "God Speed,"  
You must against them take the lead.

They are our brother men who know  
Through self-same pang a brother's woe,  
Who read as clear as on a scroll,  
In every man a Heaven-born soul,  
Whose dignity is that alone  
Which cannot brook a tyrant tone.

*Published in "Songs of Light"*

SOWING AND REAPING

I never sought the easy path to tread,  
To wait on others for my daily bread;  
To toil and strive, to finish and achieve!  
This is the faith in which I do believe.

An ever present joy the testing hard  
Of those fair talents given me to guard;  
And sweeter still the day when doubled powers  
Bring doubled duties with their richer hours.

I have been willing to expend my days,  
Knowing for certain that the future pays;  
And knowing, too, that every good thing won  
Is but the answer to the service done.

No fruitful Then without the toilsome Now,  
No harvest rich without the rending plough:  
Without the shady vales no mountain height,  
Where man can climb, and find the perfect light.

## The Days of Gathering Experience

During the seventeen years in which, as secretary and president, I was using most of my powers to build up the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, there were other happenings which contributed a definite value to my mental and spiritual development. I have mentioned a concert tour to Tasmania; but some time after the founding of our library my friend, Mrs Hunt, whose husband was the lessee of the Metropole in Launceston, invited me to spend three months with her and help in organising a society of Braille-writers over there.

It was a delightful holiday. I stayed at the Metropole much of the time, and met my new pupils who were destined to form the Library for the Blind in the north of the Island.

Later I went south to Hobart, to do a little of the same kind of work in that town. The journey was taken by car—my first long ride in an automobile. It was a picnic journey—meals by the roadside at Lovely Banks and beside the broad waters of the Derwent. At Hobart I stayed a few weeks in the home of Mr S. Mann, at the time Railway Commissioner. From there I added a few Braillists to the ranks of the transcribers, and was happy with the wife of my host.

There were other holidays spent in Tasmania, where I was always welcome among my friends. Once it was with the Wilsons of "Mount Nassau," near Bridgewater. Across the stream from the house was the moaning Mt. Dromedary, and wierd cries of waterfowl startled me from my sleep at night. It was here I found perfect fossils in the limestone brought in for the kilns, for lime-burning was one of the industries of the Mt. Nassau estate. My inquiring mind was filled with these things, and my senses were steeped in the beauty of my

surroundings, until I gave words to it all in some of my poems.

Next time I visited the Hunts and Wilsons, these two families, in which the wives were sisters, had moved down the South Channel to Birch's Bay, where there was a still more entrancing prospect than at Mount Nassau. Apples everywhere, giant berries of nectar quality, berries that warranted the proverbial second bite, wonderful beans and lettuce, flowers so luxuriant and plentiful that I marvelled. On quiet nights I could hear the faint roar of the sea on the neck between North and South Bruni, and happy birds came about the house to dip their beaks in the juicy plums and pears in the orchard round about. We wandered the beaches of the tiny bays, gathering shells and listening to the whisper of the calm tides; sometimes we rocked gently in Mr Wilson's boat as he fished or with a lantern speared a fat flounder for my breakfast.

Intense were the impressions of the Arcadian life of those summer days, and to me quite unforgettable.

Many echoes of those holidays in Tasmania are found in my writings for, although I had just begun to set my thoughts in verse, I was storing up for later times, as I had been doing from the days of my childhood, ready for the hour when my inspiration should get to its singing.

But not all my holidays were spent on the other side of Bass Strait. It will be recalled that I met Mr Monteath through befriending a sailor in whom he was interested, Captain William Watson, of Sorrento. The old blind gentleman lived with the family of his brother in this little seaside Paradise, and they had built him a comfortable cabin in the garden well within call of the homestead. There Uncle Will would smoke his pipe and potter about, growing vegetables for the family and cultivating his peaches, plums and tomatoes, while he could always pause for a yarn with any chance passer-by, or sit down for a solid gossip with a friend.

Mr Monteath felt that reading would dispel the monotony of the days and nights of this lonely man, and he got him up to Melbourne for a few days, bringing him to my home to see if anything could be done for him. The plucky old salt was game to try Braille, and succeeded so well that later there was a regular correspondence between Sorrento and the Aston house. This was not accomplished in one lesson, however, and the Watsons invited me to pay them a visit, see the beauties of Sorrento, and give Uncle Will a few extra hints.

The memory of those charming girls, of their goodness to the old blind man, and their lavish attention to myself, is still a bright spot to look back upon. They brought to my notice everything of interest and charm in the place. We walked the white limestone roads, smooth as a pavement in the spring, through miles of blossoming tea-tree, almost overwhelmed by the fragrance of the flowers, mixed with the scent of the clematis wreaths draped over the taller bushes; the waters of Port Phillip lapped at our door, and shelly sands were there for wandering feet and collecting hands. Away along the sandy tracks we would go, through the scrub, and out on to the cliffs above St. Paul's Bay, to listen to the oncoming ocean and the gurgling sweep of the waves as they charged over the rocks. Never before had I been near the ocean, and its deep voice had an awe and fascination for me which rather amused the girls. Often I would stand outside at night and try to fix the absolute pitch of its note just as I might have done with a great organ; but with this sound, as with all mighty vibrations, the keynote is so all-embracing that it can sing any tune in the mind.

One evening Mr Russell, husband of one of the daughters, came in for a hurried tea. He was a member of the life-boat crew, and orders to be ready had gone out, for the sea was roaring like a thousand monsters, and we could perceive a tremor in the earth beneath our feet even on the bay side of the peninsula. Some ship might need help on that wild coast



of the Back Beach, where it is so easy in a storm to miss the entrance to Port Phillip. Mrs Russell proposed that we should go to the Back Beach and have a look at the storm. Muffled in coats and with our hair tied down with scarves, we set off by sheltered tracks through the tea-tree, vaguely realising the fury of the wind, until suddenly there burst upon me the fiercest blast I have ever faced. It lashed me with sand and sea spray, drummed in my ears, and shrieked around the rocks and hummocks, while below crashed and thundered roller after roller, as if it would batter a way through the narrow isthmus to the bay beyond. It was awesome, terrible, our senses were benumbed by the noise and strife. We could not stand against it, and, falling on our hands and knees, we crept back into the shelter of the tea-tree, and got our breath after a brief rest. How the scrub stood up against that wind is a mystery still, for with all our will we found standing unbearable and breathing a great effort.

Many ships have been lost on that wild rocky coast, and having experienced the force of wind and wave there, I well understand the nature of their perils.

My visit to Sorrento was repeated many times, always in the springtime, when the place was alive with myriad birds, and like an orange garden with the flower scents. At that period houses were few, and I believe that Mr Coppin was busy with his plans for popularising this seaside resort; that popularity has brought about changes, but the old Sorrento I knew is still my first love of all the places I have been, for there I learned to know the sea, and to find in it responses to my own nature—its restlessness, urgency, and ever varying lights and sounds, beneath which was always the constant struggle to go further and further, and to win against obstacles.

Yet a third phase of experience was presented to me during this period. My cousin in Sydney opened her home and heart to me and off I went, "On the Jag," as some folk I met over

there described it. Of course, Sydney, with its shrieking ferries and echoing harbour, was very new ground, and I greatly enjoyed the many jaunts I had with Nell and her friends. We did the rounds of the family, picnicked at beaches, and romped around generally. My cousin's husband was a seafaring man, Captain John Herbertson, and most of the members of their circle were attached to the sea in some way. Now, it should be remembered that I had lived in a Puritan atmosphere from the day of my birth, and had been so sheltered that nothing of the Bohemian life had ever come under my notice. Here in Sydney I had my eyes opened. My objection to a kiss from a boy just home after months at sea was the subject of great hilarity, a little spree was to be tolerated after the hardships of a long voyage, in which abstinence had been compulsory. I hardly knew where I was, but one day cleared it all up for me.

A lad who had left his ship with a lot of money belonging to the Company had lost it while indulging in a few at a pub, and landed at my cousin's door in a most pitiable plight, and agonised with shame and remorse and the expectation of disgrace. He had nowhere to go, no friends in the State, no money to pay for food and lodging, and Nell could not turn him out. During three terrible days we stood by, waiting for the police. The unhappy boy could not eat or sleep, but tramped the house and yard unable to make up his mind whether to give himself up to the law or to the oblivion of the harbour just below. At last it was agreed that I should stay at home with him, in case anything happened, while my cousin went to the office of the company whose money had been lost. Truly we feared he might destroy himself, for he had good antecedents and dared not go home in disgrace.

At the office my cousin was informed that some friendly stranger had picked up the bag of money and had delivered it safely to the manager. What a relief was this news! And

now it only remained to get the boy back to his home in another State. Nell found the fare, and sighed comfortably as she said, "That's all over! but I bet he will catch a scragging from his dear mamma."

Perhaps you understand what was borne in upon me then; these gay, feasting, happy-go-lucky, not-too-fastidious people of the sea had different ways from those of my Church-going family, but what hearts they had! It was anything but frivolous conduct, this giving shelter to a boy in such trouble; they had accepted the fact that naughty boys are more in need of friends than good ones, and after that I felt less affronted at a bit of rough play, or at a lad who grew a trifle sentimental after a glass of liquor. Not that I like such things, but tolerance should always increase with years.

No attempt is made in this story to catalogue events and dates in their exact order, but I shall add to the record another event which affected me deeply—the death, at thirty-three, of my sister Eliza Crocker. She had been the last sister in our home, and had helped with the household duties; then she had married and settled near us, keeping always in close touch. The arrival of her three children provided us with little thrills, and her Monday visits to us were almost festive occasions. Then the fourth babe was expected, and very hard times made it more of a shadow than the advent of the others. The winter was very cold, and in June Lizzie fell ill, having taken a severe chill. The little boy came before his time and dire sickness gripped the mother. For six weeks she fought the battle, for she was a happy wife and mother, and wanted to live for her husband and children. In three weeks the infant died, and our sister soon knew that she must follow. It was a violent time when we laid her to rest, and the pittosporums were beginning to show waxy clusters. I was convinced that death at her age, and with such reasons for living, was not natural. Medical science can now cope with cases like hers, and for that I rejoice, when I remember the bitter grief we

suffered that winter. This was the first of the six of mother's children to pass on, not including the two who had gone before I was born. The break was a hard one to face, presenting, however, some lessons not to be learned in any other way. I refused to blame God for the blow, and found myself afterwards on a much firmer rock of understanding the principles of human destiny, and fixed in a stronger faith in the righteousness of the Almighty in His dealings with men. So I came through this, and many other trying experiences, as the years slipped by in work and play, in growth of mind, and in the development of interests and friendships.

Something should be said about my amusements in those days. Of course, a Church concert was common enough, and we had socials and sing-songs in the various guilds and clubs to which I belonged. It was about this time that I broke through the taboos of my set, and went to my first opera, *Aida*. The impressions made upon me were remarkable. I loved the music, and the rather banal story was new to me then; but I came to the end of the play with a sense of the ridiculous, similar to that I experienced over the body in the bag in *Rigoletto*. The dying lovers, warbling rapturously to each other in their lethal vault, smote right in the belt my practical realism, especially when the friend who was with me whispered, "The walls of the vault are bulging in and out in the draught from the wings!" Since that first visit to the theatre, I have gone occasionally, when the play was attractive and the actors good, for fine voice production, whether in song or spoken words, is always entertainment to me.

I took in my programme a totally different type of amusement, and one which would doubtless shock my highbrow friends. This was the variety show at the Temperance Hall every Saturday night. The seats were priced at threepence, sixpence and a shilling, and I chose the cheapest. There in the back rows gathered the *Herald* boys and other tough lads,



about twenty of them, and they provided me with all the fun I needed. They were bold fellows, loud in their comments on everything that presented itself, either on or off the stage. They scuffled their feet if the items did not suit them; they joined in popular choruses, often substituting their own witty parodies for the author's words; they discussed their personal doings with much frankness right behind my shoulder and laughed raucously at each other's smartness. One night there was a deserter from our ranks, and just before the programme started in came Billy with a lady friend. I hope Billy liked it, when a shout rang through the hall, "There he goes with his Dona, and by gosh, he has gone to the shilliny seats! Billy's a swell tonight."

My right to occupy the seat in front of this group was never challenged, and I kept matters safe by a small bribe now and then. The lemonade man would appear with his basket, and a couple of bottles at my expense would always go round among the young gallants. But soon I discontinued the lemonade, as bottle-rolling with considerable noise became prevalent, and I feared that the management would throw us all out. I chose peanuts instead. That was at least a quieter form of hospitality for, although I could hear vigorous munching, I am sure the audience did not miss any of the programme on account of it. Many a happy night I sat on those back benches. After years I absolutely forget the singers and comedians who occupied the stage, but the larks of those boys still give me a smile, whenever I turn back to that page. Their behaviour was consistently decent, and only once did I hear a lapse into bad language, and it was speedily squelched by the other lads, who cried, "Shut up! Don't yer see there's 'spectable ladies in front!" I am glad I had not to clean up the Temperance Hall after these little sprees.

Returning once more to the developmental side of this part of my life, I should like to include here two extracts from my previous literary work, which were inspired at that time. It is



so often stated that when blind people express an admiration for the beautiful, and claim that they have much enjoyment from it, that they are merely relations of Sir Echo. In this matter it is difficult to be clear and convincing, but the first extract may offer food for thought to some.

I was walking in The Gorge at Launceston with my friend, Mrs Hunt, and she grew pitiful because she supposed I could not enjoy that lovely spot. Later I embodied the gist of our conversation in a poem, "The Power of Beauty," and here are a few stanzas from it:

Then I began: "Your wish is now fulfilled,  
 Dear Friend, and on my mind is laid the scene.  
 I have beheld the gentle town-clad hills,  
 And rugged grandeur, too, of this ravine.

"All by your words impressed; yet I say,  
 That ere you spoke I knew the place was fair,  
 For knowledge of its loveliness had sunk  
 Deep, deep within my soul to linger there.

"Your words have made it vivid and more clear  
 Each detail; yet I feel no more delight  
 Than at that sense of beauty mystical  
 Which came unaided by your clearer sight.

" 'Tis surely folly to assume that God  
 Has placed the only medium in the eye,  
 Whereby our inner selves receive the good  
 Found in the glories of the Earth and Sky.

"Each human sense within our bodies stored  
 Becomes the vehicle of other things,  
 And soft impressions touch on every nerve,  
 Sending a message to their very springs.

“Beauty is not the vision satisfied,  
But something deeper, planted in the soul—  
A longing for the spirit perfected,  
For something not unfinished, something whole.

“If not, then why do we conceive in things  
Invisible the type of all that’s fair?  
What is the beauty, then, of Holiness,  
The loveliness of Mercy’s tender care?

“Who hath beheld the Mansions of the Blest?  
Yet Heaven is our beauty’s goal and end!  
And what more glorious than the love of God,  
So glorious that we cannot comprehend?

“If color’s pleasures I have been denied,  
I feel the touch of Nature on my mind,  
And in the roaring triumph of the flood  
A victory over circumstance I find.

“If I were deaf and helpless, dumb and blind,  
I would not be an outcast from the light,  
For God another channel would provide  
By which could enter streams of pure delight.”

(Published in *Maiden Verses*.)

BIRD-NESTING

A SONG FROM SORRENTO.

With merry laugh and eager hand,  
We picked the long clematis strand  
About the tea-tree clinging,  
For we had spied some clustered bloom  
Just spreading out its seed-time plume,  
And ready for the winging.

But when the treasure we possessed,  
We found a tiny songster's nest  
Upon its stem suspended;  
Three pretty eggs of soft green shade  
Within its mossy cup were laid,  
By shading leaves defended.

And in the scrub the parent-bird  
Calling distressfully we heard,  
O'er all her labor wasted;  
And we were sorry to have spoiled  
The joy for which the bird had toiled,  
And yet had never tasted.

(Published in *Maiden Verses*.)

## Adelaide Visits

During the period I worked at home as a music-teacher, I did much public singing, appearing at as many as forty concerts in a year to help raise money for churches, charities and social organisations of various kinds. I cannot say that I was greatly enriched thereby, for in those times the demand upon the services of musicians for unpaid assistance was positively scandalous. Often the organisers would demur if even a five shilling expenses allowance were suggested, and a vote of thanks was considered adequate in return for time spent, fares disimbursed, and the cost of new music and of dress suitable for platform work. All non-star performers, like myself, had to submit to this banditry, or risk losing pupils, friends or prestige.

One day, however, the post brought me a letter, inviting me to go to Adelaide, and sing in the Town Hall there, on the occasion of the annual meeting of The Royal Blind Institution. Mr Hendry, the manager, had heard me sing in the Melbourne Town Hall at a Rose Show, and offered to pay expenses and find hospitality for me and the additional inducement of meeting many friends both in the blind world and outside it. This was most exciting. I made ready with gala dresses, and practised my songs, "Bid Me Discourse," and Handel's "Let Me Wander Not Unseen," until I could warble them with ease and confidence. And then away I went by the west-bound express, in search of a new experience. I shall never forget the excitement of that trip, Mr William Finlayson was the treasurer of The Blind Institution, and he and his family entertained me during my stay in Adelaide. The concert was successful, and I received gratifying attention from the press, while every hour of the time was filled

with some outing or interview. Lunch at the gardens, a picnic day among the lovely hills, a social with the blind, and visits to old and new friends made me happily weary every night, and warm with anticipation as each morning broke.

I was filled with admiration at the abundant flowers, of which I came in for an ample share, and the great scented oranges to be had in Melbourne shops only by the opulent few. I grew merry at the little railway train, puffing noisily through the street from the port, the bell on the engine donging incessantly to keep the line clear of the pedestrian public. Joy, novelty, petting, were my portion during that delectable fortnight.

One experience I like to remember especially, as some more recent happenings have revived its impressions greatly. Mr Hendry had called me up to meet the Rev Gifford, an old friend of mine, and, when this interview was over, he told me that we were invited to pay a visit to Dr C. H. Soutar, the honorary medical officer of the institution, I was told how kind and attentive he was to the needs of the blind in matters of health, and Mr Hendry added that our host had the same hobby as myself, the game of verse-writing. So we took a cab and drove to the house of the doctor, just as he was finishing his evening call of patients. I found him a most genial gentleman, given to sly jokes and a spot or two of teasing. He made fun of himself, and of me, for bothering about poetry, but we managed to get a bit off on one another. I had written some lines at dawn, when travelling by train across the desert, and Mr Hendry had his typist make a few copies, and one went to Dr Soutar, while he read or recited to me his famous Em'ly verses.

Next we turned to music. I went to the piano and sang several songs for him, and presently I found he was joining me with his violin, improvising cleverly as I sang and played. I raked up from memory all my Mendelssohn and Beethoven, and many trifles of the classics which I could execute, and



all the while his tuneful fiddle followed the notes harmoniously. It was a very pleasant evening, and has often come back to my memory, as later I realised that the doctor was winning a place for himself among the poets of this young nation. The humour and playfulness, so evident in his writings, are true to the pattern of the man I met so many years ago.

Perhaps the picture had grown a little dim, when one night, at a recital given by Alexander Watson, I heard this distinguished elocutionist give out a poem by, as he said, Sootar or Sowtar—he was doubtful of the correct pronunciation of the name. It was my old friend “Em’ly,” and next day I wrote to Mr Watson, gave him the right way of the name, Sootar, and told him where he would find the poet. Since then I have been in touch with the doctor, and have exchanged letters and copies of our books, and learned that Mr Watson did find him out at his home in Adelaide.

In due time I got back to Melbourne and to the hum-drum ways of life, but I came laden with those imperishable trophies, good wishes, happy memories, and a sense of honors won, even though they were of the humblest type.

Later I had several other trips to Adelaide. One was to attend the Congress of Esperantists, and in its way it was just as rich and exciting. But no visit could be so fraught with the glamour of that first one, for it was more personal, more novel, and opened for me a totally new gate to the garden of experience.

## Early Literary Efforts

At this point in my story it seems appropriate to say something about the early development of my literary work. With a mind full of impressions of the beauty of the world and its living people, and the desire to find self-expression in some form of art, and urged on to wipe out my failure at the university in some way, I soon began to try out my powers in original writing. Always a lover of books, and successful in my English lessons, I turned my attention to verse, although I did not neglect prose efforts as well. Poems of varying quality, some very poor as I judge them now, poured from my little Simplex typewriter; friends showed some interest in them, and suggested the publication of a small volume. My typewriter was not equal to the work of preparing this script, so my niece copied down at my dictation, selections of the best, and I took them to Massina and Co. Yes, they would publish them for me, if I paid the whole cost of fifty pounds in advance. At first I was daunted by the magnitude of this responsibility, for I had come from a family ever afraid of taking grave financial risks. However, I knew of the subscription method of launching a book and I sent out my circulars, inviting advance orders to guarantee the cost.

That was in 1901, and the book was *Maiden Verses*, being my first or maiden effort. The reader may guess that this attempt brought neither money nor fame, but it did pay its passage through the Press, and in some quarters cast over me a glamour which I found decidedly pleasing. One really valuable service it rendered in establishing me in the Australian Literature Society, which met at Furlong's Studio, in the Royal Arcade, Melbourne. To the monthly meetings came many whose names still live among us. Mr and Mrs Furlong

were our kind hosts, and the encouragement they gave to all was incalculable. Among the regular members I can recall Bernard O'Dowd, a debater of the gesticulating type, always a dreamer, emphatic in expression and tenacious of his opinions, sometimes giving the president, Dr T. P. McInerny, some genuine work in steadyng up the meeting. Howlett Ross was often on hand, with fine interpretations of Gordon and other writers. One night he started on a recital of "A Battlefield Funeral," by Major Reay, a little gem of prose describing an episode of the Boer War. I thought to myself, "this isn't much," but suddenly I discovered that my eyes were wet, and the solemn and pathetic words rolled on in Mr Ross's glorious voice and fine style. Well, I knew that here was an artist, since he could move a young woman who giggled at the death scene in *Aida*, and perceived something ridiculous in the dying warbles of Rigoletto's daughter.

Others were there who either wrote a little or helped with papers. Miss and Mrs Hunter and the Malmgren sisters, and many more who have vanished from my knowledge. All these, like the Furlongs, bore on high the banner of the local writer, encouraging us to go on with the building of a literature that will some day be the glory of Australia, in spite of neglect and contempt, and in the face of the absence of any financial reward.

With Dr McInerny, and with the succeeding president, Rev Dr John Mathew, the distinguished writer on ethnology, I formed genuine friendships. Sometimes the genial Irish doctor would come along at the close of the meeting and say, "I think there is coffee and cakes at a place I know round the corner. Come along!" and he would escort me and my companion to a supper house, and overwhelm us with "desdemonas" and "othellos"—rich confections popular at that time—and with delicious but liver-racking coffee, thickened with cream. Wherever I met the doctor, he had something good for me. Once I was strolling around an exhibition of

art, well plastered with "Do not touch" notices—he came along by accident, and, deciding that I should touch what I wished to examine, got Mr Douglas Richardson, the sculptor, who was in charge of the show, to take me round and give me access to all the lovely carvings and sculptured exhibits. Not long before his death, this scholarly old gentleman, loyal and devout to his Church of Rome, and endowed with a natural gift of spiritual-mindedness, came to visit me at my home in response to a letter of condolence I had sent him at the demise of a sister. I found his memory weakening, and missed the quick mental grasp which had always characterised him; but he still loved a joke, and we exchanged some of the old ones of former days. At parting he said, "Well, tell Tilly Aston I shall meet her again in a better life later on!" and so he passed from my earthly ken.

A year or two after that evening I met old Dr Maloney, who had sometimes come to the Australian Literature Society meetings with his friend, the doctor, and he told me that one of the chief pleasures of the future existence would be to meet Tim again—and so lovable was T. P. McNerny that there are many other people who feel the same.

At these meetings, also, we often had visitors who were not members but distinguished guests. Generally, the authors were invited when their books were under discussion, and one night we had Mrs Aeneas Gunn, then quite a young woman. Another time Edward Dyson was to be our guest, but shyness overcame him, and he stopped at the door near the top of the stairs, and thus we were deprived of the pleasure of lionising him.

It was a great night when Rolf Boldrewood sat among us. He was a grave and dignified man, perhaps somewhat stiff, as might be expected in an official of the Department of Justice; still, we were proud to have him. Of course, we did not entertain these lions without insisting on a roar, and so it happened that those who went to those meetings had the



privilege of knowing in a slight degree many people whose names are now on the distinguished list.

In recalling the eminent writers who came to those meetings, one must not be forgotten, namely, Mr C. R. Long, M.A., who, although he was beginning to come into prominence for his editorial work and his books on Australian History, had all the time been a constant member of the Australian Literature Society. It was not long before he began to take an interest in my work, and my contributions read at the meetings brought from him kindly and helpful criticism, and sometimes admiration. Sometimes he would ask for a copy, and chat with me at a later meeting about my efforts. When he assumed the editorial chair of the school-papers, it was his pleasure to use some of my verses—a great thrill for me to appear among the educators of our children. Mr Long continued his friendly interest, and reading papers on my writings and keeping an eye on my progress from time to time. When I received the appointment in the Education Department he wrote congratulations, stating that he was sure the step would be profitable to the children and creditable to myself. I always felt that his outstanding quality was his utter loveliness, and not far behind was his perpetual youth fitting him to comprehend the viewpoint of the young, even though he is an octogenarian now.

As suggested, I sometimes contributed to the programme, and wrote many essays and stories which were read there and subjected to comment and criticism. It was in this fellowship that I developed greater skill and better taste, and it led on to more publishing, although in a different sphere of writing, with more prose and less verse.

In the first decade of this century I prepared a set of twelve sketches, *The Woolinappers*, which I offered to the Methodist Church paper, *The Spectator*. To my joy these were accepted, and ran as a serial for twelve weeks. Apparently this material from the byways of Methodism gave a



lot of pleasure, for that paper offered me more work in the form of historical accounts of our Church in various parts of Victoria. The old pioneers were fast dying out, and an endeavour was being made to preserve that cross-section of our national history. I visited the Castlemaine and Stawell districts, gathering much good material, which later came out in *The Spectator*. But the pay received was nominal, and such jaunts away from home showed their harmful influence on my teaching work, and I was obliged to give them up.

Meanwhile the Spectator Publishing Co. brought out the tales of *The Woolinappers* in book form, a two thousand edition, which ultimately returned to me all the money I had risked on it, and some profit as well. This was in 1905, and three years later I offered *The Straight-goer* to the same paper, and it also appeared as a serial. My short stories appeared from time to time in the weekly journals, and I was slowly getting a footing, when my whole life programme was switched over to another sphere. But these were my early adventures in writing, and some of the influences that encouraged me. However, I cannot overlook other sources of inspiration when offering the story of my earlier efforts in literature. In my middle twenties, my brother, with whom I lived, bought a house at Moonee Ponds, and we all moved out there. It was a fairly new suburb, and regarded as a kind of local Siberia by our friends living nearer the city. Now, we were sincerely attached to the Methodist Church, and one of our first moves was to join up with that congregation. I took up teaching in the Sunday-school, and found it a valuable experience. At first I had boys, and had about as much joy and sorrow with them as other people who try this job. Later, a class of senior girls needed a leader, and I was transferred to this division. Candidly, I had more trouble with the young ladies of the late 'teens than I had with the boys, for who could suppress a grin when a lad of twelve shot out the answer, "Damsons," to my question as to what are the fruits

of unrighteousness. Nevertheless, the girls and I had good times together in profitable co-operation as teacher and scholar, and, as the years have passed, I have often met some of them, mothers or even grandmothers, who were glad to see me again and make merry over our associations in those early days.

But the Church activity which contributed most to my development was the literary and debating society. I found some very choice spirits there, and soon they helped me to get my own measure among them. We tore each other to pieces in glorious arguments, introduced each other to new books, held discussions, socials, magazine nights, and tested out our skill in many ways, and over a number of years. The president was Mr James Martyn, afterwards of the Australia Steel Works, and among us were some men and women of real talent. The drudgery was generally left to the capable family of Holt, from which the secretary came. To this day, when we meet, Miss Holt and I talk over the merry hours we had in that big vestry behind the Gladstone Street Church. Of its members, now scattered far and wide, we sent out engineers, lawyers, a member of Parliament—Mr Ed. Greenwood—and a University magnate, Dr Maurice Miller, recently Vice-Chancellor of Hobart University.

In this atmosphere I throve mentally and spiritually. The experience had this advantage, that I tested my powers against seeing folk, and held my own reasonably well. For psychological reasons I always advise the young blind to do the same, for, among ourselves and in contact with our family and intimate friends, there is a danger of over-estimating small accomplishments, just as a mother is apt to do of her own child, and judgment is distorted and aspiration cooled off. Out in the battlefield of hot debate lies no more mercy for the weakling than is found in the wolf pack, and it is good to grow strong in the struggle with an adversary whom you know to be worthy, and whom you can respect.

Thus, I tried myself out, not always winning, of course, but learning how to win and how to lose. My literary style improved, I acquired new knowledge and wider tastes.

There was another source of education available at that time. The district of Essendon was always rich in cultural means, organised by public-spirited folk of whom our Methodist Society was prominent. We had University Extension Lectures every winter. One series was particularly fine, delivered by Dr Lawrence Rentoul on authors of the Victorian period, much to the enlightenment of us all. The district also had its choral society and its operatic club, and the Town Council sponsored a literary association of its own.

Life was indeed very full for me at this time. I did a good deal of public singing, for my work as a teacher of music and voice production forced me out into this kind of service. I travelled much in the suburban trains, either to pupils, or to attend meetings of the blind, and queer were some of my adventures on these journeys. May I end this chapter with just one little story. I entered the railway carriage at Moonee Ponds. At Ascot Vale a young couple got in, and, as soon as the train started, he took a long, loud, and rapturous kiss from his lady. She cried, "Oh, don't"—as she looked at me sitting opposite. The boy remarked, "Oh, that's all right! she can't see!"

I could not resist the retort: "Well, if I am blind, I am not deaf!" They got out at the next station without another word. You see, that was in the days when hugging in public was not quite the thing.

I SING TO YOU

I sing to you, my friends, of secret wishes,  
Of hopes and aspirations, love and fear,  
Of light that sometimes on my spirit flashes—  
But falls the music sweetly on your ear?

I sing to you of humble inner visions,  
When the Eternal Presence hovers near,  
That you may share the light and exultation—  
But is the song resplendent to your ear?

I sing to you of joys that thrill, and sorrows  
That make the sum of every passing year  
Of things of loveliness that give me pleasure—  
But is the music rhythmic to your ear?

Yet sing I must when life the chord is touching,  
Or Heaven's harmonies are flowing clear,  
Or Nature's wealth of beauty stirs the senses,  
E'en though, perchance, I find no listening ear.

(From *Songs of Light*)

## Esperanto and Overseas Links

About the beginning of the present century there appeared in Europe the most successful attempt to introduce an auxiliary language which should provide a satisfactory means of communication for people of all types of hereditary speech. This new effort was named Esperanto by its inventor, Dr Zamenhof—Esperanto, the hoper. My interest was first directed to it by an article which I read in our embossed magazine, *Progress*, and it had been contributed to the paper by a young and scholarly Swede, Harald Thilander. My fancy was captured, for I had had my struggles with French, Greek, and Latin, and knew how little use they had proved to me. By this time I was well immersed in the work for the blind, and I wanted to know what was being done in other countries from which we got very little information through English channels. So I sent a letter to Mr Thilander at Stockholm, and soon received from him a small grammar and vocabulary, which had been printed in Braille for the blind in Paris, by M. Th. Cart.

The ease with which I taught myself this fascinating language positively delighted me, and, although my enthusiasm was a joke to many of my Philistine acquaintances, I went right on with it. In a few weeks I could both read and write letters, and, by the year 1907 I was beginning to collect most useful accounts of the work among the blind in many lands otherwise inaccessible to me.

This knowledge I was able to use for the good of our sightless community here, for, in some directions, ideas about employment, education, and recreation had outstripped our own. At one time and another I was in touch with most of the European States, from the Balkans to Portugal, and from Italy in



the south to Russia in the north, and everywhere it was Esperanto which opened the doors.

I need not add more to prove what a boon this auxillary language was in my special work, but I want to speak at greater length of its great value to me personally. Its clarifying effect upon my studies of my own English were inestimable, and through it I touched the literature of many other countries. I also acquired friendships, so to speak, with many kinds of men, introducing me to a broader humanity, not to mention the deep insight I got into other lands. Some of those with whom I struck up a correspondence were very remarkable people, and contributed as much to my development as to my pleasure. It was not long before I grasped the fact that, with slight differences, all men are brothers. These "Otherlanders" told me of their homes and families, of their struggles and aspirations, of their national customs and daily practices; and I, with a similar taste in letter-writing, gathered them into my heart by showing them my own daily life.

At home in Melbourne, I joined the Esperanto Club, and I need not remind any of my old comrades there of the very happy experiences we enjoyed together. What a thrill I had when a large party from the club went to Adelaide for a Congress! Of course, our movement, and all pertaining to it, came in for a good deal of chaff, but I am still an Esperantist, and only the exigencies of the war have cut me off from communicating with the few remaining letter-friends. Many have passed on, as the years went by, and what has happened to the rest will not be known until the peace is ours—but permit me to introduce you to a few members of my select circle.

First comes Harald Thilander, whose life story is one of the most romantic I have ever read. Blind, deaf and partially paralysed from scarlatina early in life, he nevertheless mastered five languages, and married a musical composer for his first wife, and a Finnish poetess for his second.

He runs a Braille printing house near Stockholm from which issued, before the war, our two Braille Esperanto papers. His chief printing is for the Scandinavian blind in their own tongue, and so great has been his contribution to the cause of humanity that the Polish Government gave him a Decoration, and later his own King made him a Knight of Vasa. I need not say that correspondence with him has been a privilege.

Next I present Karel Emanuel Macan, a blind Czech, music master and composer, honored with the friendship of Dvorak, and in his time well known in Prague, where his works were often performed. He died some years ago, and I have not found another to fill his place. From his letters I felt that he was a mild and gentle man, but waxed very warm when writing of the Germans among his people, and often wrote of a society called the Sokol, whose aim seemed to be combating German conduct of the aggressive kind.

One of my earliest contacts through Esperanto was John Bergh, the Finnish author. This gentleman did not interest himself very much in matters of the blind world, but his great ability and growing fame made his letters valuable. Practically blind, he worked as a journalist, travelling all over Europe, and, at the time of his death a few years ago, he had to his credit seventeen novels, some volumes of verse, and numerous articles and stories. His letters were always full of Finland, "The Land of a Thousand Blue Eyes," derived from its multitude of small lakes; and he took me in spirit through the woods, carpeted red with wild strawberries, and out to make my official and rather heathenish salute to the Midnight Sun on Midsummer Eve. I lost contact with him in the last years of his life, for Finland was no longer the abode of sweet peace.

Yet another delightful letter-friend was a sighted lady living in Mexico. This was Natalie von Schenck, a German aristocrat by birth, who had sought health in her younger

days in the mild airs of the subtropical America. She was always charming, sending me little souvenirs, copying into Braille the Aztec legends, and stories of their Pyramids. Very exciting, too, were her accounts of the visits of rebel bands, when they would rip and destroy everything of beauty and worth, and threaten her and her women with murder and rape. Miss von Schenck owned silver mines and was very rich, and on her notepaper was always a crest, but it never occurred to me that this had a special meaning. The years went on; then one Christmas I received from her a letter saying that, as she was old and felt eternity approaching, she would like me to have something which had been her personal possession, and that she was posting me a handkerchief. When it came, it was made of silk hand-made lace, and bearing the same crest as appeared on her letters. It is the most beautiful 'kerchief I have ever seen. So that was my last sign from her.

It would be, perhaps, six months after this, when I received a United States newspaper from a blind correspondent of mine, in which he marked an account of this dear lady. It told how she had lavished money in founding a school for the Mexican blind, and how she had spent her time and substance in her efforts to uplift the native peasantry. The article named her Countess Natalie von Schenck; and I had not heard a word from herself of all this work for the blind and for the under-privileged, nor of her title and great estates. Possibly our correspondence was all the more appreciated for this reason, and I believe she enjoyed it, as it extended over more than twenty years.

Esperanto also brought me some English friends. The Stacy family, at Buckhurst Hill, proved the most constant. Maud, a gifted and beautiful blind woman, kept me always in touch. She was active in blind affairs, an outstanding public speaker, and a staunch supporter of the Congregational Church. How I loved her letters, they were so full of detail and warm-

heartedness! I grew to feel that I knew them personally—a joy that never was my happy fortune—and to them went my nephews who were on war service in France during the first world debacle. Many of my lucky friends travelling to the other side of the globe have had the same privilege. There was always a welcome at “Woodthorpe” for any Australian, and would that I had been one of these wanderers! Maud had been spoken of as a likely candidate for Parliament, when her health failed, and ultimately she died at a comparatively early age.

I still keep in touch with other members of this hospitable family, although its brightest light went out for me when the beloved sister passed out of it. Her sisters are just now going through the miseries of the robot bombs, for their home, east of London, is receiving its share of the missiles.

Another outstanding English Esperantist, whose letters are the vehicle of many pleasant discourses, is Mr W. P. Merrick, a blind man whose activities on behalf of the blind are very extensive. His home is at Shepparton, and out from his study have gone many inventions of use to the sightless. The latest is an attempt to provide a cheap duplicating machine for Braille matter, and, judging by the specimens of programmes, round-robin letters, etc., which I have received, his efforts have been successful.

The last Esperantist to be presented here is a Russian poet, Dr Shoëv. This very remarkable man was born in a peasant home of the poorest, and, being blind from birth, must have spent his life, under the old order, in begging his bread. But like so many other handicapped people, his ability and temperament were such that nothing could keep him down. He was a natural rebel, and fought for a chance with desperate tenacity, until the revolution occurred and opened the way for him. He made his way through college and on to the Moscow University, where he gained a Doctorate of Letters. In due time he was appointed head of the Cultural Department



of the Blind, editor of its special publications and controller of its field of investigation. He began writing poetry when a boy of twelve, and has developed this talent until he has several books to his credit. Most of his writing deals with some phase of blindness, with the special use we make of our senses, and of the ways of the sightless in their intercourse with the outer world. Of course, the language is Russian, and consequently beyond my ken, but several of his poems came to me in Esperanto, and I liked one in particular, "The World Rings," and made an English translation of it for my own pleasure. When Dr Shoen learned of this, he gave me permission to use this translation. Therefore, I offer it as the conclusion of my chapter on my adventures in Esperanto.



THE WORLD RINGS

*A Poem by Dr F. Shoen, Russian Blind Poet*

*English Version by Tilly Aston*

They say that like a rolling tidal sea  
The sunlight pours, and floods the airy space;  
That man may truly know his fellow man  
Only by what is seen upon his face—  
“Poor Blinded One,” they murmur, “Life must be  
Long misery of darkness unto thee!”  
But I reply, “This darkness and this light,  
This lifelong wretchedness of quenched sight,  
Are less than nothing in the sum of things!  
To ears and heart intent the whole world rings!”

My grateful body feels the glowing sun,  
Whose furnace warms it, but the rich display  
Of light and color, panoramas seen  
On rolling plain, and mountains far away,  
Are words of meaningless and empty sound.  
I feel the universe in things around,  
And greet with rapture everything I touch!  
Through sounds my eager ear has learned to clutch  
Knowledge of distant spaces—breadth and height,  
Those minions thought but servants to the sight.  
My ardent spirit hears, and upward wings—  
For naught can hold it when the whole world rings.

MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

And men I love, though face and form are void—

    Their labor-loving bodies, passing near,  
Have sweaty odors that I recognise;

    And pleasure thrills me that a friend is here.

I listen, listen, till his voice is heard;

I search, and find his heart in every word;

And, meeting thus the good man in his voice,

I know him brother, and in that rejoice.

O Earth, my listening heart forever sings

In that great pæan which the whole world rings.

## Into the Education Department

I have had much happiness in my time, and there was not a period in my life in which I completely missed that blessing, but the years preceding my thirty-ninth birthday were perhaps the best of all. I had my work among the blind, my literary interests, my Church duties, and my pupils, many of whom proved loyal friends, even to this present day. The one dark shadow was the increasing debility of my mother, for she was now eighty years old, and already in the grip of the malady which broke her strong body in the end. My wonderful brother, Stephen, had stood by us both, yet I was not free from anxiety about my future, in view of the low remuneration I was receiving as a teacher and a writer.

One day there appeared a notice in the daily papers, announcing that the State Department of Education was about to appoint a head teacher for the School for the Blind. Remembering the old cry, that blind teachers were not gifted with the capacity to teach their fellow blind, I let the notice pass with little further thought. But my friend Mr Charles Monteath, who had been working with me in the cause of the sightless, came to me and suggested that I apply for the position, as he considered that I had both knowledge and experience to bring to such a task. So I wrote to the Director of Education stating my case, and received an answer from his secretary to the effect that the position would be advertised, and that an application from me would be considered with any others which might come in. In due time the official notice appeared, and I lodged my claim, with particulars of my qualifications and personal testimonials from people whom I thought worthwhile. I was the selected candidate, somewhat to my surprise and, feeling confident that I could

do the job, I was well pleased to look forward to the satisfaction of winning my bread in a sphere of labor that would at the same time realise my ideals. The salary was one hundred and fifty a year and, if I succeeded, the place would be permanent—a very welcome change to one who had suffered from great variations in income, as all music-teachers must, unless they hold regular appointments in churches or schools. I went through the necessary formal interviews, the medical examination, and so on; and then waited for the termination of the Christmas holidays to be presented to my school.

Instead, I was called up to the Education Department, and there I was informed by Mr Fussell, the Chief Inspector, that the management of The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind had refused to let me into the school, as it had no confidence in a blind teacher, and would not sacrifice the children in such a matter. Needless to say, this was a blow which I had not anticipated. I had supposed that where I could satisfy the experts in charge of the State system, I was not likely to meet with serious opposition from the board of the school, especially as payment of my salary would relieve the hard pressed funds of the institution.

I suggested to Mr Fussell that it would have been fairer had they given me a trial before taking such a step, and he agreed. So great was my distress at being the cause of such embarrassment to a department which had shown itself progressive enough to appoint a blind officer, that I asked if it were desired that I should withdraw my application, but the Chief Inspector said, "No, no! This is our affair; we have appointed you and until we are convinced that you cannot do the work required, we intend you to remain with us. In the meantime, in order that you may receive your salary, you must sign on and attend one of our schools. Could you do that?"

I assented to such an arrangement.

"Then, go home now and you will receive instructions when and where to report for duty."

I came out of that interview with a great weight of trouble on my mind, for I could not persuade myself that my blindness was the main reason for such extraordinary conduct on the part of the board of the institution. I knew that my work in connection with the Association for the Blind had not met with the warm approval of the older organisation, but throughout the seventeen years I had led the work for our adults I had been more than careful not to quarrel with the Royal Victorian Institute, and our activities only covered those spheres which had been untouched by theirs. I decided, however, not to open up this discussion with my superior officers, but to do as ordered and wait for their instructions.

In a day or two the notice came. I was to report for duty at the State School in Queensberry Street, Carlton. The head master received me very kindly but with some embarrassment, as he did not know exactly what to do with a blind practising teacher.

I asked what instructions he had been given for me, but he had none, and advised me to sit about in the various classes and listen to what was going on, or amuse myself in any other way I cared to. "Doubtless," he added, "you will pick up some useful hints, although I am aware that the work you will have to do is very different from what we do here." He then sent for Miss Elise Lang, the infant mistress, and told her to look after me, and let me do as I liked—which was in fact, nothing, as far as he was concerned.

This was the beginning of a four months' experience which I shall never regret. At first I felt a little helpless in this busy hive, but I soon found some jobs to do. I played the piano for the marches and singing lessons, told the stories to the babies; then I got into the handwork section and had daily allotments in the raffia and knitting classes. Now and then I took lessons in English appreciation, arranged songs



for some of the other teachers, indeed, it was not very long before I was working full time and enjoying it, too. I did most work in the infant room, where Miss Lang proved a true and faithful monitor, and lent me valuable aid in bringing my teaching practice up to date.

By-and-by the head master was called upon to furnish a report on my case. How glad I was then that I had insisted on doing all I could in the unexpected circumstances in which I had been placed. Of course, I did not know what was sent in to headquarters, and my next excitement was the visit of an official inspector, before whom I took my turn at a demonstration lesson in company with other practising teachers. This gentleman gave me a good report, as Mr Fussell stated later, and the department was thus satisfied that I had initiative and teaching ability in an ordinary school at least.

During these months I learned much that was not in the school curriculum. It will be remembered that this particular shrine of learning lies close to a poor and miscellaneous population, and that the children handled were of many races, and from different strata of society. Now and then they gave me a peep into their home life; dear, lovable little brats as they were. One day I was having a talking lesson with the tinies, and the device that day was to ask what they would like to be when they grew up to be men and women. The answers were enlightening. Luigi wanted a barrel organ with a monkey on it; Dick would have a big broom and sweep the gutters; Robert had aspirations to the heights of chimney-sweeping, while Charlie wanted to be a burglar. When I asked for a reason for this last choice, the wee boy said, "Because you break into people's houses at night and cut their froats." The blood-thirsty little ruffian was one of the mildest nippers in the class.

A band of bigger boys soon constituted themselves as my knights, and would take turns to meet me at the tram in the morning, and escort me back there when school was over. The

little girls were not to be beaten, either—they undertook to wash my teacup after lunch each day and, incidentally, to eat up any slice of cake or biscuits which proved too much for my appetite. Children about that district did not always get enough to fill their little stomachs from the home larder.

The weeks slipped on, and at last once more I was summoned to the head office. There I was told that I was to go to my own school for a three months' trial, and that Inspector Gates would go down with me, and see me settled in. I met Mr Gates at the school; there was a lot of talk about burying the hatchet and about getting on together.

My department had been told, I learned, that I was quarrelsome, difficult to get on with. In consequence, I was warned to avoid all friction, to withdraw for the present from my public association with other blind movements, and to do my utmost to justify the trust that had been reposed in me. There was no course open but to acquiesce, although I am sure my superiors never guessed what a burden this laid on my heart, nor how defenceless it left me in the face of purposeful opposition. I resolved that, if quarrels occurred, they should not be of my making, and that I would endure much so as to maintain the desired equilibrium between the institute and my department.

From the moment of my initiation to the work I knew that trials and heartaches lay ahead. That first day was shadowed by the violence of the opposition that had kept me out for so many months. As Mr Gates and I arrived, the children were singing the two-part song, "I Would That My Love." Ever since then I have disliked that really beautiful melody.

But I was now in my rightful place, and if ever a woman was determined to prove her worth that woman was myself, starting out on a new career at thirty-nine, to which I honestly believed I had a call—and, as I had overcome in a school conducted for the seeing, I knew that I could win here.

## School-Teaching Years

In making a brief record of the next few years of my life, I wish I could state that my forebodings on entering my school were unfounded, but I had not been long in my new position before I realised that all the talk about the buried hatchet was empty air. That weapon, figuratively speaking, was ever at hand to give me a tap on the head or a more smashing blow to my self-esteem whenever a chance was possible. There was the intense loneliness among people who did not trust me. The strained relations which had been created by my appointment had a psychological effect on the whole staff, of a kind which I had never previously encountered. The juniors seemed to think it their duty to endorse the verdict of the management, so I was left severely alone, as a dangerous person, one "impossible to get on with" and best avoided. Hence I was virtually sent to Coventry, and treated with cool civility but with no friendliness. At this distance of time I can see more clearly the difficult situation which faced all those employed by the institute; a subconscious barrier was set up between them and me, beyond which they thought it most unwise to penetrate. One member of the staff actually told me that it was more than his position was worth to be caught talking to me in a friendly fashion, but I do not believe this was true, only that it indicated certain subterranean heat generated by my enforced presence in the school.

Little by little my relations with my fellow teachers improved, yet they were paid by the institution, and knew the barrier must still be observed while allowing co-operation in the work.

Making a supreme effort to ignore any opposition, I took to my duties with energy and enthusiasm, and the children responded splendidly to my efforts. I was placed in charge of the highest class, which was then about standard four of the State Schools, and I aspired to raise the standard of education to that of seeing children generally.

To attain this goal, I worked at terrific pressure. In the evenings I transcribed into Braille, arithmetic and other textbooks, as there were no modern aids of this kind in the school. In addition, I copied choice selections from the school-papers, which I made available for individual reading, to keep my young folk up to date in some measure. In this work I had the help of a dear sighted friend, Miss Alice Coleman, later Mrs Perce Cumming, who had been a music pupil of mine at Moonee Ponds, and who clung to our friendship, even till her death in the winter of 1944. Not to fall behind was the aim of my life in those strenuous years.

My classes made good progress, and the annual Inspector's examinations were always satisfactory; the grade was going up, and we began to have plans for some higher education as well. At this point it may be stated that I launched two scholars out into secondary schools and laid the foundation for the higher honors of which the school rightly boasts today.

The going was hard, however. Interference with the regularity of the curriculum was often great. The barber came in school hours, likewise the dentist and the tailor. All music lessons clashed with some subject in school for each individual child, and I was constantly striving to make up this time, so that the pupils should not fall behind the class. I recall one inspection in which a certain boy failed completely in grammar. The fact was, he had never been present at the grammar lesson, since it was his half-hour for piano instruction. The constant interruption of the programme struck me so forcibly that I decided to keep records for a half year. At the end I found that every child in my division had been



absent for one-third of the hours, and in this record I did not include any leave for sickness. There seemed no way of avoiding this, at least, in the realm of music lessons, for the practice and enjoyment of music is an indispensable part of the education of the blind child.

Perhaps the greatest annoyance in the way of interruption was the presence of swarms of sight-seeing visitors. Money appeals were being made, and every time the deluge flowed in genuine work had to be set aside and the smartest pupils trotted out to demonstrate with items long since mastered. Again, in voicing this complaint, I am forced to acknowledge that the nuisance is unavoidable while the school is conducted as a public charity. The raising of funds is such a task that every means must be used to that end; but I assert, with both warmth and bitterness, that blind children should no more depend on charity for an education than their sighted brothers and sisters. This perpetual begging cry is detrimental in many ways. It robs most of its victims of initiative, accustoms, if not drives, them to mendicancy, that is, as a group; it deprives the blind child of the well-to-do citizen of the best available training, because the parents of such children will not use a charity as the school for their sons and daughters. And, besides all this, it makes the weaker ones expect to have done for them many things they could profitably do for themselves. So, in the sum of it, this charity business is no good at all for our handicapped children.

Feeling strongly on this question, it may be imagined that I was often unhappy when insensate strangers stood before my scholars, and passed rude and audible remarks about any peculiarity, or sniffed in maudlin and futile pity where no pity was needed. If they could have heard the comments of the brighter youngsters after their departure they might have been more restrained in future.

Such trials added to my difficulties, but they were of a general description and shared by all the teachers. However,



it is natural that personal prods should occupy a large place in the vista, and I was no exception. The steady and covert opposition was the hardest to bear. There were slights and tricks lying in wait, and I never knew where they originated. I think you will recall that I was to have a three months' trial before I should be appointed permanently. At the end of this period Mr Gates visited me and inquired if I had met the committee; I had not seen one member, and said so.

About a week passed, and, one day at the lunch hour, the housemaster informed me that he had leave for the afternoon, and was leaving his division to me to do the best I could. Half an hour later the lady assistant informed me that she had been sent to the city on some business for the management, and supposed I would be able to keep her small scholars profitably employed, and not to bother about the regular programme. At this I was a little upset, for, until that day I had not been alone in charge of the whole school. I made no comment, however, and set about planning my afternoon's work, for I knew that if I claimed to be qualified I must be prepared to meet emergencies, and to shoulder whatever came my way. With older scholars as monitors for the little ones, and a set composition for a few, I launched the rest of the boys and girls on a lively spelling bee, to which a couple of small prizes were attached as a stimulus. This exciting job was at its highest, when, suddenly, I heard footsteps coming along the passage outside, and next moment I had half a dozen members of the board in the school-room, conducted by the superintendent and, with them, a representative of the Education Department. To them I explained the absence of the other teachers, and told them what exercises were in progress. I am thankful to say that the children were happily employed, the discipline was satisfactory, and the inspection went off without any mishaps. After that I did not hear anything more about a three months' trial, and my appointment was duly gazetted.

Another matter which held up the final decision was the problem of securing the necessary insurance, which at that time took the place of the regular contribution to a superannuation fund. I interviewed some of the leading companies, and found that the life of a blind person was not regarded as a good risk. Some absolutely refused to consider an application, while others wanted to load me to such an extent that a policy would have been a very unsound business proposition for the one who paid the premiums. I went to the Chief Inspector about it, and placed the facts before him, and he advised me to ask that my appointment be made with exemption from insurance. So this condition was gazetted by the Governor-in-Council when my appointment was later confirmed. As an offset I pledged myself to do my best to make provision for my future, and could show that I had already begun to do so by purchasing a small cottage in Moonee Ponds, and by taking up an endowment policy with the Temperance and General Association, for that company had been more liberal in its appreciation of my needs.

Meanwhile the months mounted up into years, and, with their passing, I did not find the opposition abate. The annoyances were, perhaps, trifling at times, but our daily experience is generally made up of small things. Nothing that could be kept from me was allowed to reach my ears, and if I chanced to make a casual inquiry, I was coldly rebuffed for stepping over my well defined limits.

One day the wardsmaid came to the schoolroom, and informed me that matron wanted all the girls. I asked the reason, and got the emphatic reply, "Matron wants all the girls!" I sent them out and went on with the lesson to the half-dozen boys remaining in my classes. Presently the girls began to trickle back, and I seized on the first to arrive.

"What were you wanted for?" I asked.

"Oh, Miss Aston," she whispered, "So-and-So has 'things' in her head!" So that was it! One of the children had been

away for a week-end, and had contracted pediculosis—certainly most vexatious in a school of model cleanliness; but why the clean-up should be done in school hours puzzled me, and why an explanation could not have been made to the teacher for the loss of nearly half a day's work puzzled me still more.

I tried to laugh at such happenings even if it cost me a mighty effort. Sometimes I felt that deliberate attempts were made to undermine my influence with the scholars. They were told at times, when they chanced to quote me, as children will their teachers, that Miss Aston was blind and didn't know.

Now and then there would flare up from my smouldering torture fierce fires of rage that I must suppress, and I fear that on both sides there was suspicion, distrust, and dislike. I would say to myself, "This will break you if you give way, so hold fast to the reins, Old Girl!" I read somewhere the epigram, "Rage is futile," and I knew it was. This was an atmosphere so foreign to my nature and experience, that at times I could scarcely breathe in it. I struggled on for twelve years, resolved that I would see it through till my legal retirement, or until the cord of my will and purpose snapped in spite of me.

Only once did I come near to giving up. It was on a day when a throng of visitors from my own district of Essendon was sight-seeing at the school, and the official conducting them made some disparaging comments in my hearing about my lack of qualifications. I shall never forget the spasm which seized me. I could barely walk, but I managed to get to a seat in the boys' play-room, where I sat and tried to get a grip of myself. I belong to a breed that is not exactly humble; it was more in my line to hit back, and this I dared not do, remembering the injunction of my Department to keep the peace. I went back to my classes, but the crowd had moved on to the other sights, and the afternoon ended at last. I longed to get to a quiet spot where I could ease my burning heart

with tears, and I set out for my home. As I walked toward Greville street, there faintly reached me from the buildings of Wesley College the chords of Rachmaninoff's Prelude, and to a spirit battered as mine had been, it conveyed a sense of utter loneliness and misery. It took me by the throat, and I should have fallen but for the fence. I leaned my face against the cold iron and shuddered and wept until I felt calmer. Fortunately, nobody passed just then, and by degrees I recovered my composure, dried my eyes, and made for this haven of rest, where Miss Lawson comforted me and helped my resolution to persist.

I thought that day that I could bear no more, but many years followed through which brighter threads wove in and out. I got to love the children with their quaint sayings and trusting ways; I gradually reached a comfortable understanding with my fellow teachers, and there was pride in the successes of the brighter pupils. The principal interest of my private life was the building up of my home in this old cottage, where I have realised the hope of those stormy times, that here I should find a tranquil old age when my teaching days were over.

I am aware, as I bring this chapter to a close, that the story it contains is rather painful, and to some it may seem unnecessary that it should be written. However, it is the explanation of many phases of my life which have puzzled friends, and if such folk will give a little thought to what was little short of persecution in certain quarters, they will understand the hardening effect it must have had upon my later conduct.



## The Blind Teacher

Before I pass on to tell of my retirement from teaching activities, I want to add something further about the blind as instructors of their fellows in darkness. It is my earnest conviction there is a sphere of useful and congenial employment for the blind in this occupation. I am aware that there has existed in the past a divergence of opinion on the matter, and die-hards are still to be found among the minor groups of educationists. They quote failures, and generalise their statements on such cases; but it would be discovered, if honest research were made, that these unsuccessful blind teachers should never have been selected for this profession. Any person, with or without sight, desiring to undertake class work with children, must be alert and capable, qualified scholastically, and endowed with the right caste of character to inspire respect in the child and confidence in the parent. Of course, the teacher with eyesight, who has intelligence and ready wit, can soon master all the special devices used in the education of the blind, and even has some advantages in the case of young pupils in the more ready detection of bad habits and undesirable mannerisms. But to the blind teacher with ideals, there is much more than the administering of the mechanics of learning and knowledge of social conduct. It will be realised by the thoughtful that the blind child begins to face psychological difficulties that never show their presence in the ordinary youngster.

A handicap is likely to set up an inferiority complex, doubled and trebled as he goes out to meet life in the various strata of society where he must live. Sometimes his behaviour is over-praised; think of the gush of admiration when he can



feed himself properly, dress himself and attend to his own simple toilet, or can warble a ditty in his own infant fashion. At other times a genuine accomplishment, a victory over his condition, such as climbing, racing about, lighting a match without burning his fingers, is checked and punished by misunderstanding guardians, until the little chap does not know where he stands. He gets in this way an utterly distorted outlook, and it is a very gifted, sane, blind person who can escape and rise above it to a worthy conception of citizenship and to a full development of his own spirit.

Here is where a good blind teacher comes in. Naturally, erudition must go with this psychological quality, inspiring and uplifting the standard of the student, and stimulating him to put forth his best, to persevere in holding his ground as he fights his way through the field of social success or necessary bread-winning.

The blind teacher can, and must, implant this spirit. Out of experience he, himself, speaks and acts, and the children know it, in spite of the fact that the principle is never presented in so many words. The general cry of those who do not want the sightless teacher in the school is, that they cannot maintain discipline, that they cannot keep themselves up-to-date without assistance, that they cannot keep the rolls and records, that they cannot do this little job and that little job.

All this objection was hurled at me, as if many another executive had not been obliged to appoint someone to deputise for him. While I was in my school, the young women sent from the office on messages would go back with the report that Miss Aston's class was talking, that some boy was lounging as he worked, or slyly indulging in a surreptitious sweet; and poor Miss Aston didn't know. I was not always ignorant of what was going on, but my views on discipline had been modified by reading such works on education as those of Dr Montessori, and so long as I got discipline when I called for it, so long as the children learned, and were kind

and happy, I took no exception to a bit of easy-going, thus leaving the way open for a certain amount of self-expression, and a good deal of learning from each other by the scholars. Naturally, I did not explain all this, for I was not responsible to the young ladies from the office, nor to the forewomen in the workshops, who discussed my short-comings freely in that quarter, too. I just went on with my work, depending on results.

No teacher will suppose that on every single occasion of misdemeanors I was fully aware of what was afoot, for the young and old delight to baffle authority now and then, and my portion in this way was the common one. The other members of the staff could have been criticised equally for some things that happened now and then, but my blindness was quoted as the explanation of peccadilloes in my classes. Now and then, when perhaps I was engaged with one section, a frisky lad would resort to "shoving," and the lady assistant would give me a hint, for which I was always grateful, but this was only on rare occasions in months, and I claim that my discipline was good on the whole.

Looking back to those years, I recognise the human frailty which finds expression in small gossip in a busy community like that in The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, and only hope that some of the carpers have repented ere now. One or two points have emerged from the still remembered fog of trouble I endured. The first is the certainty that my presence in the school left an upward influence on a few of the pupils; the other is the fact that since then the staff has tended to become blind, until today there are sightless teachers in both school and music departments.

There is one incident in relation to my ability as a teacher which I should like to chronicle, as it gave me peculiar pleasure at the time. It occurred some years after my retirement, when I had recovered sufficiently from the injury to my back and the consequent surgery to get out to meetings.

The "Gordon Lovers" had invited Mr James McRae to be the speaker at their monthly gathering, for he had, I believe, just relinquished his post as Chief Inspector in the Education Department. He soon noticed me in the audience, for often he had been at my school for the periodical inspections. I was glad to meet him again after so many years, and we chatted comfortably about my doings since I had fallen out of the ranks.

Then, when he got up to speak, he told the meeting how delighted he was to come across Miss Aston once more, how he had known me and my teaching work among the blind children for so many years, and he added, "Miss Aston was a teacher of superlative quality, an inspiration to her handicapped scholars, and, indeed, a source of inspiration to myself as a responsible officer in my Department."

This long-deferred praise was very sweet to me, especially after the sustained opposition I had endured, and do you marvel that I secretly purred a little.

I still feel that Mr McRae's opinion, publicly expressed, was one of the most important I have had, and it counter-balanced some of the disparagements which came from persons much less qualified to judge my ability; for here was an expert whose word would have been respected in any part of the world.

## The Joy of the Teacher

It is a common experience with teachers to rejoice in the successes of their pupils, even when the subjects of such instruction have long since forgotten the affectionate or grateful relationship they had with their instructors. In my own case the remembrance of some of the children I taught has proved a compensation for the labor expended: so, in my glances back into time, I make my modest boast over those blind children who are making good in the world as genuine citizens.

Among those whom I started on their way to higher education are two or three who are doing well. Donald Forbes is holding the fort at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, where he is filling a teaching post under the Education Department similar to the one I held. He won his degree at the University after my health broke down, and, of course, I can only claim to have started him, as I did others.

Another pupil, who did not go to the University, but who was, nevertheless, a source of considerable satisfaction to me, was Miss Rose Rappeport, a kind and intelligent pupil, full of zest for her work, and always anxious to show appreciation of her teacher. She now lives in Perth, Western Australia, where she is devoting her time and talents to the cause of the blind, and to other movements of a philanthropic or social character.

But the former scholar who has given me the most unqualified contentment is Mr George Findlay, now occupying a position in our community of usefulness and respect. When I first went to teach in the school for the blind, George was a small boy of about eight years of age, and in one of my special classes. I soon discovered how eagerly he



absorbed any instruction imparted; how earnest and alive he was; and I realised that here was a boy who would succeed, unless some untoward circumstance should intervene. He, and a couple of his class mates, forged ahead, fulfilling the entire curriculum of the ordinary State school programme in each successive grade. I should mention that his music studies were not part of my work, but were pursued under the care of the musical director of the school, Mr David Palmer: my job was that of the school teacher in the accepted sphere. In due time George went out to continue his studies in an ordinary school for the seeing, at one of our secondary educational centres, and from that time he ceased to be my special charge. Ultimately he went on to the University, and, with the aid of several scholarships, took his degree of Bachelor of Music. It was a proud day when I sat beside his father to see his degree conferred.

Always I have maintained some kind of contact with this gifted and much loved pupil, although his expanding responsibilities have made our meetings less frequent. He has set some of my verses to music, and we have enjoyed the mutual pleasure of hearing them sung on rare occasions.

Then came the happiness of his marriage with Miss Amy English, a capable and loving fellow graduate of the University; and the births of their three sons from time to time have almost seemed like family happenings to me, so warm is my feeling for George and his wonderful partner in life.

Meanwhile, our young blind musical bachelor had made good in his chosen profession. He has all the pupils he can take; broadcasting and composition must have only the tag-end of his time, although it is the universal opinion that he does well in both these spheres of his art. He has for years held the post of organist and choir-master at the Gardiner Presbyterian Church, where he is highly esteemed.

With all this success and outstanding ability, perhaps his old teacher is most proud of her friend on account of the



qualities which are evidenced in the loyalty and constancy, in which I am happy to be a big shareholder. I think I have a right to this pride in his life of endeavor and accomplishment, since, although I have not built the entire structure of it, I had a definite part in laying the foundation. I have lived ever with the ardent desire that the blind should, as in the past, hold their own in the world of work, and do it with complete efficiency, and also that they should fill their niche in the nation's social life. Where George Findlay is concerned, I am satisfied that he is fulfilling my cherished wishes.

## An Intimate Sketch of Sir Baldwin Spencer

*Contributed to "Bohemia," May 1939, and reprinted by  
the kind permission of The Bread and Cheese Club*

One evening, years ago, I was invited to the Library of the Blind to hear a lecture on Central Australia. At the time I had heard of the scientific expedition of Professor Baldwin Spencer, but knew little of the heart of this great continent and its people; so this lecture, by the distinguished explorer himself, was a memorable occasion for me.

As he described his adventures in that firm and friendly manner which was his own, I drank in every tone of his pleasant voice. Then followed his recordings of the curious aboriginal music, so unlike anything in my music student memory. It was a new experience for all of us, for we were too young to have known the abo. in his own neighborhood, and could never have visited him in his mysterious inland haunts. I was so delighted that I waited to thank the Professor, and I must have mentioned my teaching work among the blind children.

"Now would you like to bring along a small class of the older ones," he said, "and I should be glad to have them at the Museum, and give them a special lesson, when they could handle the weapons and utensils with me?"

Of course the offer was accepted. For many weeks, on Thursday afternoons, half a dozen of my scholars were taken to the Public Library by one of their teachers, and there the great man simplified his vast stores of knowledge to the needs of the children, showing them spears, womeras, stone axes, grinding stones, and preserved specimens of the flora and fauna, while he wove about each a story, to help the

children understand as they followed him with their fingers on the object.

What a thrill it was to examine the birds, and what a delectable shudder was reserved for the snakes and lizards! Some of the weapons were plastered with ochre, and consequently made the hands of my little folk very dirty. Noting this, their fatherly instructor commanded them to keep their dirty paws away from their clothes; and at the conclusion of the lesson he led the tribe of us away to the lavatory, where he himself assisted in washing the "dirty paws," and in drying them carefully on the towels provided for the staff.

One day it rained very hard, and the thoughtful gentleman showed us out by the back gate so that we might get our tram with the minimum wetting.

I should say that we had about ten of these lessons. He told us about black children, of queer meals that made us squirm at their mention, how snacks of snakes were really quite good to eat, and the honey-bag ant, and the fat grubs, and the lily roots. I, at least, shall never forget the experience, whether the small folk who were the chief object of his kindness do so or not.

A few years later I once again got in touch with Sir Baldwin Spencer. I had had some correspondence with a very distinguished blind Frenchman, Professor Pierre Villey. This gentleman, blind from his early childhood, had attained great heights of learning; in fact, he was Professor of Literature in the Vermont Farrand University, and afterwards held a similar post at the Caen University.

He was planning a thesis on the blind of primitive peoples, and asked me to get him some information about the blind of our indigenous races. But there was nothing I could find in published books, so I wrote direct to Professor Spencer, and once more found him the same kind and cordial teacher of all who would learn. I have still among my cherished possessions the principal letter of that correspondence. The

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letter gave me all the information available at the time, not very much, as Sir Baldwin said, but Monsieur Villey was very pleased to have it from so distinguished an ethnologist. Thus I came into contact with this man, whose charm seemed to me as great as his attainments. Great as was his brain, I have always felt that his heart was greater.

THE WOMAN'S SONG

*Written after inspecting some aboriginal millstones*

Afar in glowing desert waste,  
Where rises burn with sullen red,  
Or where the breath of tropic airs  
Steal mistily through jungle dread.

I hear the weird and plaintive song  
Of native women, as they fill  
Their office at the daily task  
With this rough-hewn primeval mill.

The rustling nardoo whirls around  
The hollow in the nether stone,  
While strong, dark hands the pestle wield  
In rhythm with their chanting lone.

Hard food, and life more strenuous,  
Though woman's lot to strive and bear  
Men children, and to nourish them,  
E'en to the bounds of selfless care!

I hear them singing down the years,  
Since Time began, this song of bread,  
A lilt that echoes round the World,  
When women see their tribe is fed.

But if, perchance, the nardoo fails,  
Nor comes the grist to feed the mill,  
No more the cheerful rhythm runs,  
But mournful wailings sad and shrill.



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O dark strong women of the wild,  
Ever your nardoo song is fraught  
With cadence deep of pain and death,  
By the lean days of hunger taught.

Like the bread song of other lands,  
Where women work and grow and grind,  
Food for their children and their kin,  
Yours is the song of womankind.

## Out of the Education Department

Up to the time I entered upon my duties as a teacher for the State Department, my health had been excellent for nearly twenty years. In fact, I had not consulted a medical man for many years until I faced the examination in connection with my appointment. My first year in this position ended with the death of my mother after a long illness; and, although I was sad and worn, the Christmas vacation followed and gave me the chance to recover and prepare myself for the renewed strain.

My work always brought much satisfaction to my mind, but the unrelenting opposition to which I was subjected began to tell, as I carried on year after year. It would require a tough body to withstand the intensity of emotion so often engendered in the struggle. Perhaps the greatest harm was done by the constant suppression of feeling, which I found inevitable to preserve the peace with the management of the institution.

By degrees I felt my energy waning, till the year when the pneumonic influenza shook our community to the roots, when I had a serious illness lasting ten weeks. I got back to work after that period of leave, and thought I was my old self again. A year or two later we had some sickness in the school, and I contracted some infection which was diagnosed as cardiac influenza, and held me chained for another long period. My wrath at being laid aside was as bad as the deadly sickness; yet once again I got back, and went on with my job. In spite of these breaks, my reports from various Inspectors show that in teaching at least I was still fit, though at times I was so tired at the end of the day that I went to bed soon after reaching home.

Then the Christmas holidays at the end of my twelfth year approached, the annual examinations had to be gone through, and the breaking up and all the fuss of the season. The last day came, and we were busy packing away all the appliances, filling the last requests of the pupils, who wished to borrow slates and books with which to amuse themselves in the vacation. Margaret Stewart, one of my girls, was very enthusiastic over arithmetic, and she had asked me to show her the method of finding square and cube root, as she planned to have a revel in these problems while absent from classes.

I went to her desk, and was standing by to show her the pattern of the sum, when suddenly the world vanished. When I came to my senses, I was on a couch brought in from the playroom, and Matron Briggs and Miss Bryan, the lady assistant, were attending to me. I had fallen with my temple on the corner of the desk, but I soon recovered enough to walk out to a taxi which had been called, and was delivered at my house, and into the care of Miss Lawson.

At first I supposed it had been merely a fainting fit, and, as I had taken places for myself and Miss Lawson at a holiday resort for most of January, I expected to be quite restored by the time school opened. But before setting off, severe debility sent me to a doctor, who told me I had had a slight stroke, and must go to bed for at least six weeks.

At first I scarcely realised the significance of the blow. I cancelled my holiday booking, retired to my couch and tried to think, although my brain was definitely hazy for some weeks. One idea got possession of me—I could never go back to my school again, and it would be a solution, if the stroke were repeated and proved fatal. How thankful I could be if my vexations, struggles and mental misery were over for good.

For weeks I lay, gradually recovering. It was not my will to do so, but just the inherent strength of my constitution that

had come to me from my mother. The recovery was only partial, and month after month I waited for returning health.

The most distressing symptom was a persistent pain at the bottom of the spine, thought by the doctors to be a reflex from the cerebral condition; and I lay here on the sofa, trying a rest cure recommended by a specialist called in. I had quite forgotten that about three weeks before school closed I had had a fall through a sliding chair passing under me. Later, after a year and a half, the X-ray revealed that I had injured the lower part of the spine.

The long story of this part of my illness need not be told; suffice it to say that the surgeon ultimately removed the injured bone, and gave me back a good many happy and useful years, though not my power to stand up to a job like regular teaching. It took me some years to get out of the house again, but the blessed event came at last.

Meanwhile considerations of income began to oppress me in my sickness. I continued to apply for sick leave, but after the regulation three weeks on full pay and three on half pay, the leave was granted without any pay at all. Before the breakdown came, I had managed to complete the payments to the bank for my cottage, so I had a home rent free—also, I had saved a little money, which soon melted away in housekeeping, medical expenses and maintenance. At last I was about at the end of my resources, and must soon face the necessity of accepting a refuge with my relatives. Let me say here that they did not fail me, and would have taken me gladly—but for so many years I had been building my nest, and in it I had found such happiness and peace, that to give it up was the most dreaded item in the list of my calamities.

Then came my friends of The Association for the Advancement of the Blind, an organisation I had founded, and led for years, urging me to accept financial help from that source. I could not do it — it was not exactly petty pride which

stepped in, but a strong repulsion to using funds for my own benefit which had been collected, or countenanced at any rate, by half a lifetime of service to others. Most of my friends could not understand my attitude in the matter but it was not the way.

Afterwards my fellow blind helped to sell a book for me, and in that way relieved my position considerably; the story is told elsewhere in detail.

In the days prior to my appointment as a teacher, I had been intimate with the family of Mr James Martyn of the Australia Steel Works, and that friendship had been continued through the years of my connection with the Education Department. As my illness lingered on, Mrs Martyn was often on the spot with her kind, motherly personality, and she grew more and more anxious for me, as she realised that my employment was gone for good, and that my home seemed likely to go the same way. She and her children, especially Nellie, a gifted business woman, and known as the "Steel Queen," offered to stand by me, and see what could be done to solve my problems. They were anxious to save me humiliation, and Mrs Martyn, in proposing a plan, pleaded that I had always professed to trust in God, but the Father of us all did not rain down pound notes from the clouds, preferring to use His willing children to deliver them when necessary. I found it hard to yield, yet did so when Nell quietly invited a few well-to-do friends to supply my needs. If these lines should come to the knowledge of any of that small group, let them be assured that their tender mercies are not forgotten. They kept me in my home—the best place for me, as I have always conceived it—and here I have spent about twenty of my most useful and contented years.

It must be remembered that at the date of my breakdown there was no superannuation scheme for State servants on the Statute Books. As months passed, and it became certain that I could never resume my position, there floated in a



vague rumor that such a scheme was under consideration. I was advised by a wise counsellor not to retire officially, but to go on applying for sick leave without pay until my Department refused to grant it any longer. This I did, and the game lasted a year. Then a Superannuation Bill went through the State Parliament, and I was thankful to learn that I was in a small group that would receive pension benefits without contribution.

I sent in my resignation, asking for permission to retire, and for the pension made available by the Act. The matter took many months to finalise, for there was some hitch about letters which, it was stated, I had not answered, but which actually I had not received. So in due time I was provided with a pension of two pounds a week, and resolved to live on it, however meagre it proved, and to relinquish the help coming from my friends, as soon as I could free myself of medical costs.

The prospect of this regular income, always hoped for, had made it easier for me to live on benevolent friends for a time; then, as my superannuation money settled in, some withdrew their help, but not all for at least a year or two, as it was desired that I should have complete ease of mind until my health was restored.

As for the school, it long remained a nightmare. I would awake in the morning with its shadow upon my spirit; then my mind would clear as I remembered, and I would thank God that I had been resting peacefully under my own roof, and would not be obliged to go out again into the stress which I had found so crushing. Only one more incident of that period of my life is left to tell. One day, perhaps fifteen months after I had been brought home ill, I had a visit from the matron and superintendent. They came with messages of appreciation from the committee, saying that I had been outstanding as a teacher, and an inspiration to the children; and that the one way in which this appreciation could be

shown was by making me a life governor of the institution, and forthwith the certificate was presented.

I could not control myself, and broke down weeping. I was still a sick woman, with a major surgical operation just ahead and the long-deferred recognition of my work seemed to me rather a tragic affair. I shall not write down my thoughts in that hour, but they overwhelmed me in my weakness. This was the final scene in my connection with the Education Department and so, exit Tilly Aston, the school teacher.

I HAD AN ENEMY

I had an enemy, but now the last  
Soft-fingered visitant has come and passed;  
Dissolved his body in the Earth's grey dust,  
His treasures soon to yield to moth and rust.

'Twas not the substance which I failed to love,  
That hides the spirit, as the hand a glove—  
It was the living soul that faithless fled,  
Leaving my yearning fondness cold and dead.

While he was living, fear was ever nigh,  
Lest he again should rudely thrust me by,  
Lest darts of disagreement pierce my soul,  
Pushing us from each, as pole from pole.

But now his stabs and stings I fear no more—  
His tongue has lost its power to wound me sore;  
And e'en the memory of those bitter hours  
Shall be cast out as other withered flowers.

For he, mine enemy, dwells in the light,  
Where no misunderstanding dims the sight;  
He knows how fervent was my heart's intent—  
So, fearless, I forgive, and am content.

## Making a Home

Some earlier reference to my beloved home will have given the impression that this interest in my life was one of the dearest. For twenty years after the completion of my formal education, I had lived contentedly with my brother, Stephen, where mother presided nominally, and where I gradually assumed the cares and duties of housekeeping. As time progressed, some of the young people of our family drifted to Melbourne from the country in search of a settlement in life, and it was our part to take them into the home as boarders, and help them through. So it became necessary to have some help, and Anne, my eldest sister's daughter, stepped in to fill the gap. She was still with us when I got my appointment, and for a time held the fort as mother's end approached.

That particular year was one of great trial for me. The conditions at school were harassing, and at home our dear one was enduring the bitter suffering which tortures those who die of cancer in the stomach. At the last Anne's mother came from the country, and sent her daughter back to the less trying task there. In December our dear invalid passed on, and we took her remains to Carisbrook, to be laid beside those of our father in the quiet graveyard among its rustling trees.

It now seemed advisable that I should secure a home for myself sooner or later. My brother had a bride in view, and my nieces, Lottie and Carrie, both in the telephone service, would need a place to board when this marriage should take place. Of course, neither Steve nor his prospective wife were willing for me to go; in fact, my decision to break away caused a temporary coolness among us. But I had practically run the house at Moonee Ponds for years, and realised that I

might be tempted to try the same thing with sister-in-law, who had every right to be supreme in her husband's menage. Therefore, I determined to make the wrench once, and at the beginning, and not to risk mistakes or heartaches later. Lottie and Carrie agreed to come with me if I got a house, and Anne would look after the three of us until her own marriage, which was to take place a few months later.

The train journey to my work from Moonee Ponds had been an added hardship, and for this reason I sought a house in the neighbourhood of The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. In those days it was not difficult to find a cottage for sale, especially if the purchaser was not bent on a place of a modern type. The wooden structure at 42 Raleigh street, Windsor, still my abiding place, came on to the market just then, and I bought it, mostly with money borrowed from the Credit Foncier, which I was able to pay off in about seven years. It should be remembered, however, that in earlier years I had contrived to buy a small property in Ascot Vale, and this gave me ample security for the purchase of this one; I had hoped to have this as an asset, but as time went on it proved unprofitable, so I sold it, and paid off the one in Windsor during the first world war.

It was a fortunate chance for me that I owned my house when my health collapsed—otherwise, I should not have been able to hold on here while the accidents of life adjusted themselves.

I came to live in Windsor in September 1914, and my brother was married very soon after. We had gay times settling in, buying furniture and fittings as fast as money became available. One week it would be a table-cover, the next a carving-set; the sitting-room was repapered by the lovers of my boarders, and I assure you the operation was long drawn out, and provided many extra occasions for visiting here. I had been accumulating household linen, and was well stocked in that line, yet the gaps had to be filled.



The fun of making a home is not to be despised, and I sometimes wonder what pleasure is left for the bride who can start out equipped with every smallest item for housekeeping.

The dainty extras were a long time coming; indeed, they are not all in hand yet. I wanted a place of rest and comfort from which I should wish to hasten back from even the rosiest scenes, to which my friends could resort for quiet intercourse, and where could come the members of the clan, feeling they were part of it. In this house of mine I have not had luxury and elegance, which wealth alone could buy; nevertheless, it is a home, a place where we can chat and eat, and drink tea, and where men friends can have a whiff of their favourite weed without reproach or trepidation. Warmth, too, is here, the glow of fire in winter, and the nestle of rugs and cushions. Truly, I think I have a right to call it a home.

The first perplexity I had to face was the finding of a new housekeeper to replace Anne, who went up country to marry a farmer near her father's place in the January after our removal to Windsor. I had been warned that this would be my problem, that I might have to contend with drinking women, or thieves, or with incompetence or extravagance. It was with some nervousness I sent an advertisement to the Methodist paper, *The Spectator*, hoping thus to escape the bibulous and the dishonest, if not the muddler. Many answers arrived, and I selected two as a first trial. The first was a young lady, willing to come into my home for a few months, until one should be ready for the bridal day; but she wanted much time off, liberty unlimited for the faithful swain to hang around, and no end of privileges. I desired someone likely to be permanent, so turned to my second choice. I sent for Miss Mary Lawson, a middle-aged woman, not long out from the North of England. The moment I spoke to her, I knew she was mine. She took over my small establishment, and stayed with me till her death sixteen years later. It will be readily understood that in this position a person of capa-

bility and refinement would be desirable, for I must live alone with her most of the time, trust her with my business, and leave her to do her work in her own way.

I at once perceived that the most comfortable relation to be attained between servant and employer is to get the right subordinate, and then leave her to make the best of the job.

This principle I have followed, and by so doing I won for both sides peace of mind, and perfect confidence in each other. I tried never to forget that each of us had individuality, which must be given play; each had friends to cultivate, and small interests to pursue apart from the other—thus we lived together through sixteen years, more harmoniously than often happens with sisters. Her friends became mine, and some still keep in touch with me, though it is fourteen years since Miss Lawson died. To be explicit, we learned to love one another, and her exit from this world is one of the sharpest griefs I have ever had to bear.

Her illness, once more the dreaded cancer, began to manifest itself a year after I gave up teaching. Miss Lawson had stood by me through the lingering disability of that year, and, after much thought, I decided that, if possible, she should stay here, for she had no one to whom she might turn in her emergency. By degrees matters worsened, and we had to seek for additional help in the home. For nearly twelve months I had a taste of the woes of the servant question, of many changes and losses of money through inefficiency and the rest. Then it was found necessary to operate on Miss Lawson, and at about the same time the injury to my back was discovered and I, too, had to face the surgeon. I do not like to think of those months—my operation over, but still bed-fast for many a week; Miss Lawson going through her ordeal, while I lay here helpless.

It was indeed a cyclone of troubles, and I hardly know how I survived the worry. Friends were so loving and thought-

ful, and did much to soften the blows for both of us. At that time, also, my dear guardian friend died, Miss Nellie Martyn. She had always been so strong and wise, giving me a sense of security, and the certainty that my difficulties would be solved. She had for some years been managing The Australia Steel Works, her late father's business, and was a woman of unusual force and ability. She, too, was smitten with cancer, and died at the age of thirty-nine; and thus was lost to the community one of the most outstanding citizens of her day.

As both Miss Lawson and I slowly got on to our feet the dark deluge subsided, and hope bloomed once more. Yet, it was apparent that never again would my home affairs go forward in the old, smooth fashion instituted by my dear helper.

I tried charwomen and other forms of aid but none were successful. At last Miss Ada Bradford was mentioned to me as a likely companion, and I got in touch with her, only to fall in love a second time with a dear, good woman. She came to me, willing to face the almost inevitable task of caring for Miss Lawson through her last agonies; and she is still with me, after more than sixteen years as my homemaker, nurse, companion, and friend. To have had two such women in my home is a gift of God for which I cease not to give Him thanks. Miss Lawson was a business woman, cheerful and kind with my friends, rich and poor, and endowed with unusual personal charm. My present companion, Miss Bradford, has all the charm and daintiness, and, best of all, a personal devotion equal to that of a sister.

In my accumulating years her perennial youth is very refreshing, and life would be dull without her. One by one the whole of my immediate family has passed the Bourne, and it is fortunate that I have someone capable of filling the empty place. Miss Lawson died in October 1930 and stayed with us to the end. Miss Bradford cared for us both, save that we had a nurse to relieve the last heavy months, paid for with

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Miss Lawson's savings during her long service with me. I was thus spared the horror of having to send the poor invalid away to die in a hospital. Miss Bradford and I both carry along with us precious memories of that sweet English woman, whose days, while she lived with me, abounded in love, wisdom, and gratitude.

MY OLD HOUSE

The house that I loved is growing old,  
Its beams are blemished with a secret mould;  
The rigid walls their symmetry no more  
Maintain, and slopes the level of the floor.

Each window rattles in its shrunken frame,  
And in the Winter nights the dancing flame  
Upon the hearth betokens drifts of air  
That thrust their icy fingers everywhere.

Unwilling latches slip their stubborn hold,  
The sagging doors upon their hinges scold;  
Ah, yes, alas! My house is ageing fast,  
The glory of its prime is overcast.

Yet still I strive with hammer, saw, and nail,  
With here a patch, and there a strong new rail,  
With paintbrush dipped in smiling colours gay,  
The wasting touch of time to hold at bay.

For in this house I claim the sacred right  
To sit apart, communing with the light  
That burns within me, kindling love supreme,  
That moulds in deeds my aspiration's dream.

Here I can pray, and tune my soul anew  
To everlasting truths, and here construe  
The little lessons of this life of ours,  
Its losing weakness and its winning powers.



And here a friend may find my willing ear,  
Unfolding joys, or mourning sorrows drear;  
For peace and comfort claim this lowly spot,  
Since I am mistress in this ancient cot.

However aged and grey the walls may grow,  
Though pulsing life may ever run more slow,  
It still is home, the place where I am free,  
The temple where God shows Himself to me.

## Literary Work Resumed

It is well known that one of the regulations of the Public Services is the condition that all employees must abstain from engaging in any other work which brings remuneration. When I entered the Education Department, I took the regulation seriously and relinquished any literary work I might have secured, because the regularity and security of my new income seemed a better prospect for me. For some time before my appointment I had been contributing short stories to *The Weekly Times*, historical sketches to *The Spectator*, as well as occasional poems, articles, and sketches to other papers at home and abroad. Financial results had never been very encouraging, therefore I experienced little regret when the years went by with scarcely a line of original writing, save a children's tale now and then, which went no further than my own scholars.

But once more the urge to write awoke within me—little songs and lyrics stole on to stray sheets of paper, and such expressions of my love of goodness and beauty began to pile up. At last, in 1923, the plans for a small booklet came to the surface. I would pay all costs myself, and send out the modest collection as a Christmas gift to my friends. During the period which had elapsed since the last appearance of my name as an author, I had been practically forgotten and had lost my place and standing; nevertheless, conscious that I could not sustain the hardships of my position much longer, I wanted to remind folk that I still hoped and desired to contribute something to the literature of my country. So I made a selection of the lyrics on hand, typed them, and, under the title of *Singable Songs*, had them printed by Robertson and Mullens, in time for Christmas posting, I needed about a hun-

dred, but found that I could get five hundred for a small extra sum; the five hundred edition was ordered, and I trusted to be able to sell all the surplus copies.

In this I was not disappointed—the little book captured the fancy of many. The Press, too, gave it friendly notices, and the whole edition went out within a few weeks. The printing cost me twenty-nine pounds, and I sold thirty pounds' worth, so that I came out of the transaction fairly recouped, considering I had used all I needed myself without including them in the sales.

This was not the end of *Singable Songs*, however. When a year or so later my health broke down, The Association for The Advancement of the Blind wanted to help me to adjust my finances. I have mentioned what an objection I had to such a course. To have founded and led an organisation for the uplift of my fellows, to have been its spirit and essence so far, only to fall back on it for personal benefits was utterly repugnant to me. Then they wanted to get up a benefit concert for me, which seemed the same thing under a different name.

Finally, they offered among them to sell my little book. I gave in, and a five thousand edition was printed, to be sold at a shilling each; and in this manner *Singable Songs* was broadcast all over Victoria. I fear it did not bring me much literary prestige, but at least it was my own work, and from the sales I received some much needed money. Whatever the sentiment of those who sold, and those who bought, this little brochure, I try to forget that it may have been pure charity.

I was actually too ill to take much interest in the matter at the time; yet, to this hour, I am profoundly grateful to all who desired to assist me over a period of deep distress, and it has been a spur to my endeavours of better days to bring to the blind my offering of service.

During the long weary years of my slow recovery, I had plenty of leisure for thought. As soon as I was able, I read

more, and began to write, making some efforts to regain the ground I had lost, in journals and magazines. It appeared to me, by the results, that I had lost my skill, that my outlook was old-fashioned, my style too quiet and homely and lacking thrill.

I attempted a work of fiction, saturated with the atmosphere of early pioneering life, built up by my mother, and by the odd folk living about us in my childhood. I sent this book to a leading editor, who was using serial stories at the time; he returned it with a kind letter, stating that he had read it with pleasure, that it was a good tale with a definite historical value, and that he hoped I would try to get it published in book form, although it was not the type for the serial page—too quiet to carry readers on from break to break.

Later I tried it on an English publisher, whose objection was that the intense local colouring would not suit the English reader. Thus my much travelled *Grand Commander* is still at home in the haven of my rejects, and probably will never see the printing press.

At the same time I kept on with my lyric writing, and, as no other door seemed to have a key for me, I decided to venture some poetry once more. Having made a selection, I grouped them into sets, one for each month of the year; and, with a little calendar poem at the beginning of the set, and a flower picture at the end, I thought I had a nice little volume, which I named *Songs of Light*.

I sent this to the Lothian Publishing Company, without indicating that I was handicapped with blindness. At length came a letter, asking me to call, as my book was under favourable consideration. I went, in a painful flutter, and was received by Mr Arthur Greening, the manager. His surprise was great when he discovered my disability, and, on my part, there was much heart-sinking when I remembered how apt is the business man in general to limit his esti-

mate of the attainments of such as I. I felt the colour leave my face; but Mr Greening, the friendliest of souls, went on to reassure me, saying that the head of the firm considered the volume one of the most interesting he had handled for a long time. It was suggested that the book would be improved if I added a brief autobiographical sketch, with a picture of the author, so this was done.

Further, in earlier years, I had sent a copy of *Singable Songs* to Miss Helen Keller, the distinguished American woman, who has overcome so much, though blind and deaf.

Among other letters from her there was one especially commending my little effort, and I showed it to Mr Greening. At once he said, "This must also go into *Songs of Light*, and I wrote to Miss Keller for permission to use it, which was cordially granted.

My book was now ready for the printer, but there was still the financing to face. One hundred and fifty pounds must be found, and I had to be personally responsible for every penny. Again I resorted to the subscription method with such success that, in a month or two, I had enough orders in advance to ensure a reasonable hope that I should not lose on the venture.

*Songs of Light* appeared through Barron in London, and through Lothian in Melbourne, in the year 1935. The response of the Press was surprisingly good. Looking back through my Press cuttings, I can feel the warmth and admiration which my poems inspired. They brought around me many friendly acquaintances, loyal and sincere, and since that time I have generally been known as Australia's blind poet. Most of the edition is now in circulation, and, though the profits were negligible, I lost nothing and gained what I wanted more than money—some prestige as a writer. It is hardly necessary to state here that my fate is that of all who long to be the song-makers of the people—we sing because we cannot help it. The publisher, the printer, the



bookbinder, the carrier, and the man who sells the product, all get their pay, but the poet will have to be, like myself, only too thankful if he can find a listener, and satisfied to create and record the things of beauty he discovers for himself. Yet, I have been more fortunate than most, inasmuch as I have not lost my scanty coin over getting a modest circle of readers.

*Songs of Light* served me in other ways. It was noticed favourably in some quarters of the English Press, and a copy sent to Queen Mary by the London publishers brought a charming reply from her secretary, of which I possess a photostat copy. Many other cherished letters have come to me through this and my later books. Perhaps I was most gratified by that sent by Douglas Sladen, the great English author and critic. It appears on the fly-leaf of a copy of his own book on Adam Lindsay Gordon, which Mr Sladen sent me as a present. The distinguished writer assured me that he thought my work far above most Australian writing he had read, and should ultimately assure a place for itself in the literary records of my own land. I trust his words may come true—at any rate, they made the humble author of *Songs of Light* very happy at the time. (See the reproduction of Mr Sladen's gift letter.)

There was another outcome of this publication which I must record. A few months after its appearance I received a note to call on my publishers, and Mr Greening told me that an enquiry was being made concerning my former literary work, and also in regard to my circumstances, etc. We had a chat, and I left him with the understanding that I might hear more of this later. One morning the post brought me a letter, stating that I had been nominated for an award from The Commonwealth Literary Fund, and asking for a complete list of my published works, my age, and nationality. The information was supplied, and in due time I was notified that my nomination by the Melbourne Committee was

To Tilly Aston,  
 The most brilliant-Blind  
 woman in the World, who  
 in the Seven years of Childhood,  
 during which sight was  
 vouchsafed to her, learned  
 of mankind what others learn  
 in a life-time.

She knows Nature and  
 Human Nature, as well as if she  
 saw them with her eyes, and has  
 a most delightful way of  
 Expressing her opinions to  
 those who see with their eyes.

She is a beautiful Poet and  
 a faithful writer of stories.

Douglas Parker

confirmed, and that I would receive a literary pension for life. In all my dealings with the publisher I had met only the manager, but I learned that Mr Lothian, himself, had moved in this matter, and to him my fervent acknowledgments are tendered here. This fund, as is well known, was instituted for the purpose of easing up the lot of our Australian authors. It is necessary that the candidate shall have contributed something really worthwhile to the literature of this country, and in this way it is an award as well as a financial bounty. It is also meant to enable the struggling writer to continue producing under conditions less harassing than they would be without the pension, and that has been so in my case. A recent increase in the weekly amount adds much to its effectiveness; it will be seen, therefore, that, even if my books come out just paying their way, the financial result is more satisfactory than appears on first account.

## The Book of Opals

One of the less important activities of my later years was in connection with The Mission to Blind in Heathen and Bible Lands, founded by an invalid blind man named Robert Byers, and still functioning, as far as the war will permit, from its office in Queen street, Melbourne. Soon after I had settled in my new home at Raleigh street, Windsor, I was invited to resume Sunday-school teaching, a branch of Christian work which had always claimed my services. Mr Richard Reynolds was, at that period, superintendent of the Methodist School in Upton road, and he urged me to form a class for the young women because the girls, as they grew up, drifted away, leaving no young people from which to draw the necessary junior teachers. So I took on this work, and continued it for about ten years, until broken health tied me down to my own house.

Very early in our acquaintance Mr Reynolds introduced me to another sphere of service. Opposite the Sunday-school lived Mr Robert Byers, a man just about forty, around whom arthritis had cast its iron chains. Every joint of his body was rigid, and blindness wrapped him in total darkness. Mr Reynolds took me to visit this sad case, and it became my weekly practice to spend an hour with him. I found him brave and cheerful, and obsessed with a fixed purpose to do something for other blind people. He had heard much about the sufferings of the blind in China and other countries of the Orient, and it had occurred to him that we might be able to do a little towards the alleviation of their lot, to bring the gospel to them, and incidentally to aid in their education.

Several missionaries had started small schools for their sightless charges, and, to aid them financially, Mr Byers

started a Birthday League, sending greetings to each member at the birthday anniversary, and asking for a gift for this special missionary cause, even if it were only a shilling. Although Mr Byers has long ago thrown off his fetters of pain, the organisation he set up still flourishes as a memorial to his courage, under the guidance of Miss Muriel Leighton.

Of course, this terribly handicapped man could not do his own writing, and a band of helpers took it in turn to spend half a day a week in the sick room, carrying out his directions about letters, records, and the despatch of what sums he was able to gather for the support of children in the foreign field. In this work I shared, and often marvelled at the alertness and far-sightedness of the man on the bed. His brain was active at all times, and his rare sense of humor made one forget the extent of the disabilities which gripped him.

Before he died, he had the satisfaction of seeing his mission well established, and supporting a number of children in the various schools for the blind in India and China, and calls for help coming from the ancient lands of Egypt, Syria and Palestine.

At the time of Mr Byers' death I was myself laid aside with the illness that followed my retirement from teaching, so that I could not undertake any outdoor duties in connection with this matter. But there was a job for me which seemed essential, and which I felt might be managed while I waited for returning health. A pressing need in the schools where the subjects of our care were being educated was reading matter of a kind suitable to young Christian students — not so easy to find as one would imagine. Books in circulation for our own children were often undesirable for these new converts to the faith of Our Lord Jesus, and Miss Leighton consulted me concerning a choice of material. I proposed that, to meet the special need, we might produce a small annual volume on the lines of a magazine, in which every article could be carefully written or edited for our own purpose.



The idea seemed good, and the services of a few voluntary Braille transcribers were enlisted to multiply copies—printing it in embossed type was out of the question. My part was to write the book, preparing the first sheets from which duplicates could be made. It consisted of about nine thousand words, and as it was a gift from Australia to the blind of other lands I named it *The Book of Opals*. I had in mind a threefold aim in the selection and preparation of material. First, it should keep to the fore faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and build up the principles of the Christian religion, as well as stimulate the spiritual life of the young readers. Second, it should furnish some help towards a sound education on right lines, and entertain wholesomely those for whom pleasures were few. Third, it must be Australian, and contribute some enlightenment concerning this far country to the eager people of the East. To effect these three objects it always contained some devotional reading, such as a heart-to-heart talk on some theme that I hoped would stir the spiritual aspirations of the sightless recipients, a selection of well-beloved hymns, an Old Testament story—Old Testament, because I knew that all the schools have the Gospels in Braille. To these I would add some daily texts, a short prayer or two, and a poem of some kind, with the distinctly Australian side represented by articles on our flora and fauna, a story of pioneering days or of exploration from our earlier history. There would also be a trifle for playtime, such as a Biblical alphabet, a few riddles or a guessing game.

It will be seen that the whole book had to be practically original writing, and it occupied a fair amount of time, besides keeping me on the look-out all the year for just the right items of interest. Letters from India, China and Japan satisfied me that my efforts were appreciated. On one occasion the little book was printed in Braille, I understand, and circulated to the Christian students of English in some Japanese schools.

For twelve consecutive years I carried out the duties of editor and chief contributor of *The Book of Opals*, and I have to acknowledge that this voluntary service gave me a great deal of pleasure. I had almost completed number thirteen of the series, when I received a letter from the secretary, stating that, in the opinion of certain people, the little publication was not sufficiently spiritual in character, and was not meeting the need for which it had been instituted; also, she suggested that it would be better if I obtained some of our religious journals, selected items from them, and made up the book from these, and from stories of hymns, and so on.

I was astonished, perhaps a trifle piqued, for this was the very first intimation I had had that my work was not giving satisfaction. After careful consideration I decided to retire from the job. If a snippings magazine were required, there were several such already printed in Braille by various religious organisations in England and America, and supplies could be purchased from these sources. Further, this kind of book could be got together by any intelligent seeing person, and would not demand any original talent in the editor.

Many such could be found, so I wrote and explained my views, and advised the committee to hand over the affair to someone who had access to such journals in ink-print.

So ended my task as compiler of the *Book of Opals* series.

When the number of them is recalled—twelve in all—I fancy that I must have arrived at the same cross-road as clergymen, who are said to be about worked out after twelve years of ministry in the same spot and among the same people. War conditions and the present shortage of paper would have cut out this work in any case; yet, I trust that, when things are normal once more, the magazine of snippings, or something in its place, will go out to the dear charges of Robert Byers' Mission, and shine with a light more radiant than ever did my *Book of Opals*.

## Psychological

Now and then I come across a thoughtful individual venturesome enough to discuss with me the psychological aspect of blindness—how we feel towards the sighted, and how we find the sighted feel towards us. Generally I waive the subject, for I have not yet completely analysed it for myself, and in addition, I am sure my viewpoint would not be welcome to the listener. But perhaps something may be said here, for it is the psychological aspect which explains the persistent endeavour, the resolute resistance, which carries the handicapped person through to self-realisation and worthy citizenship.

As suggested, there are two sides to the question; first, how blind people look at life and their associations with the fully visioned; and second, how the seeing react to their intercourse with the blind.

Take the first. When the eclipse of vision overtakes a person there is usually a definite consciousness of defeat, of dependence readily accepted by the very young children, but in adults rejected, even resented, with repugnance. To what extent the victim recovers from his state of mind is in direct ratio with the spirit and enterprise of the individual; for some slip quietly into reliance on others for everything, while the enlightened and courageous put up a fight against it. I have often noticed that the "patient," as they suppose themselves to be, grow exacting and tyrannical, and fret and complain when they do not get everything they demand. The reverse of this picture is the blind who resist the handicap, asking as little as possible from their friends and family, growing sweeter in patience—the genuine sort—through the

cultivation of self-reliance that leads to justifiable self-esteem. Thus they learn to avoid exactions, have fewer grievances, and their relations with the world of the sighted become more and more cordial and friendly. Out of this arises a very near approach to normalcy, and the intercourse between blind and seeing attains the same social quality as if there were no handicap on either side. Thus, the one who sees forgets that the other cannot, and the non-seeing gets no inferiority complex, and profits by the advantages of his friend. How happy such a relation can be nobody knows better than the author of these lines, who is rich in intimacies of every possible kind, with just as many seeing as blind people.

Some assert that the afflicted, including our group, are suspicious and distrustful. This I emphatically deny, save where the natural bent or temperament is such, in which case the person would have those bad qualities whether handicapped or whole. I have known sightless folk who found it hard to accept surroundings and statements without question; but I believe there may have been a reason for that, which originated not in the afflicted one at all. I remember a simple incident, which might easily explain one case at least. I was visiting a blind friend one day, and she came from her room and asked her sister, "Is my apron quite clean?" The answer was "Oh, yes!" When the blind person went back to her bedroom, the other turned to a neighbour and remarked, "She is that fussy, that I wouldn't tell her it was a bit soiled." I protested, that the woman with perfect vision, on whom her sister relied for the truth, had fallen far below the necessary standard, and if her blind sister found out, it would not be surprising if she distrusted her in future. Many people think such fibs are justifiable, on the plea that they save us from pain or worry, but they cannot abrogate the right to deceive us, and we must have about us people who are absolutely trustworthy.



Many a smile has crossed my face as I read authors who indulge their characters in such tricks, to show how pitiful are their heroes and, incidentally, how stupid are the blind. There were Wilkie Collins in *Poor Miss Finch*, King Lear's guide on the false cliff, and even our dear Charles Dickens, who made the father lie and cheat to blind Bertha about their home and his "beautiful overcoat" of sacking. It is a mystery that these great ethical writers should try to justify this kind of falsehood, and so deny the reality of their own ethics.

I rejoice to say, however, that as a rule you find good, reliable souls about the handicapped, indeed, more than that—there is love and devotion very often; and if now and then some suspect and distrust their comrades, it is their unfortunate disposition, and the fault is no more prevalent among the blind than among the sound of body.

Another psychological aspect which is propounded is whether blindness is a secret cause of grief and resentment. Of course, when a man is suddenly stricken and finds that the black shadow means loss of employment and income and great hardship to his wife and dependants, not to mention his own broken life, it must follow that he suffers bitterly.

In his heart he may rage at his misfortune, and curse God, or Fate, according to his views. But that passes, like all other miseries, and soon he begins to find that all the doors of perception are not closed, and roads along which he can advance are still beneath his feet.

Those who are blind in early life have not to go through the readjustment process, and never feel the loss, save in very rare and exceptional circumstances. Hence, among all the hundreds of blind whom I have known, only a negligible minority have had to endure for long the pangs of resentment and sorrow.

I guess most of these would have had an imaginary grievance had the real one never come to their aid, for he who wants a cause for grumbling can always find one at hand.



My sightless comrades are a very cheery lot, full of fun, well endowed with a sense of humor, capable of enjoying all good things—truly they march along the road of life singing, even if the track be narrower than the way of the seeing.

With some diffidence I turn to the other side, the attitude of the seeing towards the blind, and I am obliged to say here it is hard to get away from the "pack" psychology, that is, the tendency to say and to do things at times which indicate what a load the physically sound are apt to regard the unfit. I cannot say that I have experienced it often, yet I have come up against this instinct, which wants to exclude and leave behind the weaker members of the flock.

I recall the contempt in the tones of that woman who told me that I was mistaken if I thought her son would marry a blind girl. I found this spirit operating to keep me out of my appointment in the Education Department without even a trial.

Now and then it creeps from its lair to thrust a dirty paw into social relations, when awkward conduct puts you at a disadvantage; sometimes you know an acquaintance walks past without offering a salute, with the mental reservation "She won't know, as she does not see." I struck it again on a certain occasion when an interviewer called on me. He had been informed that, although blind, I wrote verse, and asked to see something. I brought out my books and, after examining them, he exclaimed, "But this is real work, good poetry! I didn't think you could do this sort of thing! I just supposed you were a kind of—well, you know, a rhymers."

"Just so!" I said, and I doubt whether he perceived the sarcasm in my answer. I knew it was the pack psychology once more, but he did not. So much rudeness of this kind is quite unintentional—I suppose it is difficult for a person with full sight to imagine how one without it can do anything. Yet, it is a matter of history that the blind through the centuries have contributed much more than their quota to

the culture of mankind. It seems extraordinary that a reporter should forget Homer and Ossian, Milton and Blacklock, and the host of less-known blind minstrels who wandered the world with their harps in the Middle Ages, and kept alive both the arts of music and poetry. And there are Huber the bee scientist, Metcalf the engineer, Sanderson the mathematician, Prescott the historian, Fawcett the parliamentarian, and many other illustrious names—all blind men who gave to their generation gifts worthy of the best pair of eyes.

Nevertheless, though I have written these comments on the pack psychology, I know the heart of the public is in the right place. When I recall my own experiences, and the good that has been my portion through all the years, it is easy to believe that the leaven of Christ's teaching has worked, and I love my fellows in spite of occasional tactlessness, and feel they love me. The same is true of my comrades—they are happy and forgetful of their loss, the best of them continually striving to live independently, to realise the ideals of citizenship even to the extent of setting their mark on the thought of their generation.

The economic problem is ever-present for the sightless, since avenues of employment have been limited hitherto, and the earning capacity is reduced in many cases when work is available. Then, there are many little services which the seeing can perform for themselves, but for which the blind feel obliged to offer compensation, and this further reduces their income.

Places could be found for us in general industry, but here again the pack complex shows itself. One time I was on a committee which was trying to get placements for blind workers in factories among the seeing, and we interviewed a certain labor leader on the question. His reply was, "Oh, no, that wouldn't do! The other workers would object. They would feel that we were cheapening their jobs by putting a blind man on." The exigencies of war have changed that a

little for the time being, and the sightless toiler is proving that he can undertake similar work to that of the sighted, and make the pace hot as well.

Such incidents as the above could hardly fail to beat the spirit down, if the blind would let them; but they refuse to drop into an inferiority complex; in fact, sometimes they arrive at the other extreme; but that is better for them and their friends; the battle is good and a stimulus to achieve and conquer.

Beyond question, the great aim of both blind and seeing should be to reach mutual understanding, and this can be done in all cases save those who have a pre-eminent distaste for intercourse with the physically defective. I have met a few people of this description, and with them I could make no headway. I cannot quite fathom this psychology, unless once more it is attributable to the pack instinct. It is definite, nowever, and the individuals who have this feeling do not hesitate to show it. They say it makes them miserable to meet afflicted people—if that is all, it is the result of crass ignorance, or ridiculous self-pity. God be thanked that the vast majority of men and women have got above it, and human hearts warm rather with mercy, and with the joy of helping to salvage for the community such as have been robbed of their full usefulness by such a handicap as blindness.

There is one other aspect to which reference may be made with advantage. This is the subject of compensation, so often introduced in little discourses of a would-be comforting type. Many folk imagine that, when vision fails, there is a sudden and miraculous increase in the other senses. They sigh and say, "Ah, well, if God takes one thing, he gives another."

Once a dear old lady got confused in her effort to comfort me and put it backwards—"If God gives one thing, he takes away another." Of course, I understood, and got the comfort, and a smile as well. Let it be remembered, however, that there is only one way of compensation for any deficiency, and that

is the great basic principle of life that powers which are exercised grow and increase. It is the gospel story of the talents—faculties are doubled by their application to tasks.

So when the avenues of sight are closed, there is a natural effort to make up the need with hearing, touch and smell, and possibly with the development of unknown powers within us which are called into play without our knowledge or perception. We call it instinct in the lower animals; but I truly believe it is the outcome of cultivating sense channels which we have in common with them.

Thus, whenever I come up against the miracle of compensation in the mind of my good friends, I merely remind myself, if not them, that our chief readjustments take place through our own hard work and endeavor.

## Further Literary Work

As soon as I had managed to launch *Songs of Light* and, having regard to the literary pension which had been bestowed upon me by the nation, I set to work to prepare other matter for publication. First, I re-wrote a story which had been conceived before, dealing with the child life of any such country town as my native Carisbrook, and this tale I named *Gold From Old Diggings*. I rather hoped it would appeal to some of the old boys and girls, who, like myself, had spent their early days in a rural setting. I excuse this juvenile picture by remembering that Mark Twain offered the world his *Tom Sawyer* and Booth Tarkington his *Penrod Papers*. So I got the typescript in trim, and sent it to Mr Stephens of the *Bendigo Advertiser*. His response was immediate—he wrote that he had started on the typed sheets immediately after dinner, and had not put them down until he had finished every page.

He had been bred among the gold-mines and old diggings, and knew the life I had depicted through his own personal experience; so he accepted my story for his paper, and it appeared as a serial, beginning in August 1937. Mr Stephens had been very friendly to me on many occasions, giving my work more than usual publicity and, for that, as well as for other reasons, I did not ask for any financial reward. In fact, I was, and am still, so anxious to give back to the community something to justify my pension that I was glad to have *Gold From Old Diggings* published in a paper which would reach so many people likely to appreciate this special kind of book. In that region may be found many who spent their school-days within the sound of mine whistles and clanging pumps, and who roamed the bush and climbed the mullock-heaps in



search of adventure, and I have some cause to think that they read the tale with pleasure.

It is possible that some readers who knew old Carisbrook may have recognised in Hithy Polglase my brother Steve—the boy in the story was modelled on the recollection of my brother, who was a genuine young bushman and a decidedly enterprising adventurer in his boyhood haunts. As with all my books, I enjoyed writing it, and I have not given up hope that it will yet find a wider public than on its first appearance.

On the completion of this task, I set about arranging a series of pictures of the derelict men and women, left by the receding tide of the gold rushes in almost every district where the feverish search for the precious metal had lured the hopeful crowds of diggers, good and bad alike. Around Carisbrook we had our share of these unhonored and unpitied souls, odd old characters who pass gently through my post-infancy memories.

Some of them were wont to come to my father's bootmaking shop, either for business or a pure and candid gossip; others inhabited lonely huts in the bush, from which they sallied forth at such times as money matters would permit a few days' spree at the local public-houses. They worked a little for the farmers, or fossicked in the gullies for scraps of gold, and so kept body and soul together, while they lived and died aimlessly.

Thinking of them, I had planned a little picture gallery, where I tried to exhibit in kindly words, not exactly the poor old dead-beats of my native place, but quaint, unusual people who should be representative of their type everywhere.

I believe I succeeded in this, for many readers have asked me if I were writing of Yackandandah, White Hills, Fryerstown, and many other widely separated centres where I have never visited, and of which I knew nothing more than their names.

One gentleman in a 'phone conversation, asked me if it came from Wangaratta, "For," said he, "I recognised every one of the old beggars as former residents of that locality." But the fact was I did not know Wangaratta nor its people, as I had merely passed through the town en route to other destinations. Thus, no special place is the actual scene of my tales of old-timers as written in the book of that name.

In due time the book was ready, and I took it to the Lothian Publishing Company. I had called it *Deadbeats and Derelicts*, but the publisher thought this would be a bad selling title, and suggested that I think of another. I am glad this change was made, for, after all, my choice was a harsh name for the tales, and that was the last thing I desired, since my attitude towards such broken, such luckless and unfriended beings is one of tolerance and kindly sympathy. In the end the book became *Old-Timers*, and under that name it went to the Press.

Mr Arthur Greening, at the time manager for Lothian, also suggested that I should find some well-known literary man to write a foreword for the sketches. I approached Mr Alec H. Chisholm, at that time editor of *The Argus*. Now, it happened that Mr Chisholm and I had had some friendly exchanges by post, for we were born but a few miles from each other, loved the same bush country, and found the same exhilaration in the glory of the springtime wattle bloom on the low stony ranges about our first earthly home. Without hesitation he acceded to my request, and his most valuable introductory note was a part of *Old-Timers* when it was at last printed.

But the financing again proved a snag; I had hoped for easier terms on a second book, but the publisher was willing to take no risk. Once more, therefore, I stood behind my brain child, gathering in my orders in advance. Let me assure you, it requires a lot of faith in oneself to tackle this kind of job time after time; and the most discouraging

element in it all was that the publisher was unable to sell my books to any extent. However, it did appear, through Lothian in Melbourne, and through Hodge and Son in London, in the year 1938. The press notices were again quite good and encouraging criticisms came from many competent to make them. Enough copies were soon sold to meet the cost, and from time to time the books have drifted out, until there are a mere dozen or two that have not gone into circulation.

It is a great satisfaction to me to know that I have again contributed something to the culture of the community, for this little volume had captured a phase of our Australian life which will soon be lost forever, now that our old-timers are, with few exceptions, nothing but memories.

This book brought as yet another pleasure—it put me in touch with Mr and Mrs Chisholm—quite a different experience from reading his wonderful books on our bird life, and exchanging a few letters about our mutual tastes in country scenes.

My last venture in publication was a small collection of my more recent lyrics, under the title of *The Inner Garden*. This went into circulation at Christmas 1940, and was intended as a seasonable greeting to my friends and acquaintances. I paid the whole cost myself, and ventured to print a surplus, for which there was a ready sale. If I can judge my own work, I should say that in this small collection appears my most finished verse. It was beautifully produced by The Hawthorn Press, and favorably received by the critics. The edition was small, only five hundred and fifty, and it gave a margin of profit as large as might be expected on such a limited business venture. In addition to the few pounds I made, it gave me yet another opportunity of reaching the public, and of realising my desire to serve in return for my pension.

I wonder if any who read this candid story of my literary efforts will smile and say, "She set herself at a high price."

They will think of it all in terms of vanity and perhaps marvel that I persisted. Well they will have to forgive me, though I should like to remind them that the same kind of vanity was the stimulus of many great men who have adorned the realms of culture in literature, art, science and philosophy throughout the ages. All of us know that the final verdict lies with time, and those whose work is worthless will pass away with their generation, even if they seem to shine then.

Like every struggling author, I have written much that has not been published. This includes more than one novel, many poems, stories and articles, all safely housed at the present time in my dove-cot for homing pigeons. Possibly none will ever see the printing-press, but I am glad for the few which have done so, chiefly on account of the delightful contacts they have brought, and of the sense of achievement which they have afforded.

Perhaps the most important note of appreciation I possess concerning my literary work is an inscription, written in a presentation copy of his great book, *Adam Lindsay Gordon—Life and Best Poems of the Poet of Australia*, Westminster Abbey Memorial Edition, by Douglas Sladen, author and critic.



## Last Tasmanian Visit

As mentioned in another place, I have spent many delightful holidays in Tasmania, where I had some dear friends living, more recently at Birch's Bay, down the South Channel. It was there that I found rest and beauty among the apple orchards, and along the quiet roads, or, perhaps, on the sheltered beaches facing Bruny Island across the lipping waters of the Channel. But the most memorable visit I made to the island was one I enjoyed just before the outbreak of the present war. My nephew, Fred Ault, and his wife invited me to their home in Hobart, and, as they could take full charge of me during my stay, I decided to make the journey alone and to travel by plane. I had not been up in the air before, and longed to have that experience for only once, and here was my opportunity.

I wondered if riding in a plane would have any thrill for me, and was most interested to find that it had. Swinging out from Essendon, I felt the turning about, the tug upwards, and then the steady, smooth sweep onwards. I was definitely excited when tea was brought to me, and I ate it, perhaps, a couple of miles above blue and shining Bass Strait. Next I got out my small pocket tablet for writing Braille, and dotted out some brief messages on cards which were to be posted to friends, explaining to them how lofty I felt sailing through the air so far above the level of earth crawlers.

Stopping for fifteen minutes at Western Junction airfield, we came down at Cambridge, near Hobart, right on time, and there Fred and family met me with the car, and drove me on to the city by-way of the ferry, and to their historic old house on the Domain. This was the beginning of a fortnight of such



happy whirl as I have rarely passed through. An interview by phone with the social editress of *The Mercury* came in ten minutes after my arrival, and this announcement of my presence brought round me a host of friends, both old and new. How good to me were my dear kinsfolk! Their car, with daughter Lilian as driver, ran me hither and thither to attend functions, or to keep appointments with some acquaintance or other. They took me to the top of Mount Wellington, and, while I stood with my hand on the flagpole, a flurry of snow swept over—my very first meeting with snow, since I have never before chanced to be at a place when it fell.

I gave a broadcast one morning, and months afterwards heard that some friends at Laver's Hill, near Apollo Bay, in Victoria, had listened to it. My niece and I attended an at-home to Lady Gowrie, given by the Mayoress of Hobart, and there I met some delightful women, every one of whom was a special worker in some field of public or philanthropic service. The blind folk also made me welcome at a social gathering in their club room, and the late Col. Payne, manager of the institution for the Blind and Deaf, gave me the opportunity of making a thorough inspection of the school.

Another day I had a very interesting chat with Mr Dwyer Gray, the State Treasurer. Previously he had given me some publicity in his paper, *The Voice*, particularly on account of my literary work, and my interest in the special uses of the senses by blind people. Now he took the chance to continue that discussion, and made many inquiries about the work for the blind in Victoria—I need not say that I was glad to answer him in full.

A highlight of my visit was the renewal of my acquaintance with Dr Morris Miller, at the time Vice-Chancellor of the Hobart University. He had been a fellow member of the Moonee Ponds Literary and Debating Society when we were both reaching out after mental improvement and cul-

tural attainments. So he arranged a little morning party with me and my hostess, when we could chat over old times, recall many friends of former days, and traverse again the arguments that had furnished the bludgeons of our often immature judgments of youth. It was pleasant, too, to exchange particulars of the life of each during the time which had elapsed since our last meeting, and specially interesting was it to me to learn that he had been devoting much of his time and ability to the cause of the blind in this State.

Hobart was in a festive mood at the time of my visit, not because of my august presence, of course, but to celebrate the centenary of the Hobart Regatta. The old house, which my relatives occupied on the Domain, had been built by convicts in the early days as a residence for some of the officers. It stood near Government House, and its substantial walls had faced the winds and snows of many a winter, right on the slope above the harbour. From its upstairs windows could be seen the wide stretch of the Derwent, its boats and yachts and skimming ferries, and, just below us, the flagship, there for the carnival and fun of the hour. Each morning I would arise and dress to the tune of "Waltzing Matilda," played by the band on the flagship as the breakfast serenade; and it became a regular joke that I should be thus saluted as I began my day. In addition, we often enjoyed a fine band concert from the same quarter, mellowed by the distance and the balmy February airs, and made richer by the echoing hills about the harbour.

Twice during my stay we had a picnic farther afield. On one occasion we took the road up the Derwent Valley, recalling my visit to the Wilsons at Mount Nassau, right on the roadside a mile or two from Bridgewater. The garden still smiled across to the river steamers from the front of the house, and there was the lime kiln, where Mr Wilson had taken me to open up the kiln after a big burning of the stone.

But the trip I shall ever best remember took us down the Peninsula, and on to the terrible Port Arthur of hideous repute in the younger years of this settlement of Hobart. I should like to forget what happened there, but history cannot be blotted out. There are some who would like to wipe away this stain by obliterating the relics left in the stones of prison and chapel, but should we forget how depraved man can become when started down the road of cruelty and sadism? Rather, is it not necessary to preserve such memorials as a warning to us of our weakness, when we grasp power over our fellows. Let me not dwell on these horrors, but turn to the natural wonders to be seen in this remote region of our Southern Isle. First come the blow-holes. On the day I stood beside those tremendous phenomena, the weather was moderate, but up through the main pit raged and roared the spouting sea, filling me with awe and nervous shrinking, as I leaned against the barrier that restrains the rash sightseer from too close an approach. Down in the gulf, every time an ocean wave assaulted the shore from the wide Pacific, the gush of water would roll and rattle loose stones, and hiss like a dragon against the gruesome walls. On a stormy day the scene must be terrific and the noise appalling, and the fate of a human being who chanced to fall in there would be left in no doubt.

Down on the beach we walked on the tessellated pavement, one of the world's wonders in the realm of nature, since its pattern, unlike similar phenomena in other parts of the earth, has its stratification in squares. Up on the Neck once more, I could hear the murmur of the tides on both sides, the South Pacific on one hand, and Storm Bay on the other. But from these miracles of creation we must tear ourselves away, and, in the cool of the evening, we glided northwards towards our home, past the timbered hills, under the shadows of bird-thronged trees, and over the ferry to the busy city once more.

At length the day came for my return to Melbourne, and we made an early start, crossing by ferry for the last time to the airport at Cambridge; then the good-byes—oh, so full of gratitude on my part—and up into the clouds from which I should descend to the ordinary doings of my everyday life.

But there was yet another adventure ahead. We dropped down at Western Junction, to take on the passengers and mail from Launceston, and I was interested to hear the volley of farewells and laughter which marked the loading and departure of the airship. I was sitting well to the front of the plane, and, shortly after we got up into the air, the hostess came to me, and said, "Would you like to change your seat?" I said, "No, but that, if it were desired, I was willing to move." She remarked, "I have a nice place for you down here!" and, undoing my safety belt, assisted me to get up out of the depths of my luxurious chair. Soon I was belted into another just as comfortable, and was immediately saluted by a touch on the arm, and my neighbour said, "Aren't you Tilly Aston, the poetess?" "Yes!"

"You don't know me, but I am Marshall Sumner."

Often had I listened to his skilled piano work over the air, and I remembered then that he had been touring Tasmania with Signor Borgioli. Of course, I was pleased to meet him. He told me that, while at the Conservatorium with George Findlay, he had often seen lyrics of mine which George had set to music, and that he knew me by sight as well. Next he introduced me to the great Italian tenor and his wife, who were sitting on the other side of me. We had a very enjoyable trip across the Strait, recalling the night many years before, when I heard the signor in opera with Melba, and talking of Italy, where I had some correspondents living and working for the blind.

Marshall Sumner had asked the hostess to bring me along to sit with them, and he kept me posted as to the sights—



the floor of snowy cloud over which we flew for a time, the toy ships on the water a mile or two below, the gradual rising of the mainland into view, and the island dots beaded on to its most southerly point. This was indeed an agreeable finish to my trip to the beautiful island of Tasman. I was "among the stars" as Fred put it in his next letter, in more senses than one. I came back, as on the occasion of other visits, full of enthusiasm for our neighbour State—its fine river estuary, its natural wonders, its gorges, lakes, mountains, and forests, all right at one's doorstep, will always have a magnetic pull on those who have been there. Perhaps these gems of landscape beauty may not be pattern sites for big business, but they will call their lovers to walk among them, and find there the God that walked in Eden, and the peace begotten of innocence and quiet.



## The Boy Pianist

One very delightful afternoon I can remember was one on which, just before his departure for England, Noel Mewton Wood paid me a visit in company with his mother. Some time prior to that date, my book, *Songs of Light*, had gone into circulation, and a copy of it had been given to Noel as a Christmas present. I knew of this gift through the friend who had bought the book for him, but the fact had escaped my memory.

However, one morning I received a phone call, and a lady's voice asked if I would be at home in the afternoon, as Noel Mewton Wood and his mother would like to pay me a visit. Of course, I would be most happy to have them.

In due time the visitors arrived. I found Noel a well-grown boy of thirteen, cheerful and friendly, and without any of that self-consciousness which hampers and restrains most boys of that age. Mrs Mewton Wood told me that my lyrics had greatly pleased the young musician, and that he had set several of them to music. Noel joined in all the conversation, and wanted to know whether I liked music as I did poetry. I owned up to a warm love in this direction, so he offered to play for me. Considering the poor quality of the piano I had at that time, the dear boy entertained me with his beautiful best. Then, I asked if I might hear the songs he had set to my verse, our songs, and his mother sang them to me while Noel played the accompaniments. They were quite remarkable for so young a composer, although I dare say that Noel will not have so high an opinion of them now, at his more advanced stage of attainments. We chatted about them, and my youthful guest wanted to know what

made me think of the ideas in my poems, where they were written, and under what circumstances; and I indulged him with one or two of my little secrets on the subjects, and tried to make him absorb the impressions which had inspired me at the time of writing.

I was much surprised that a gay, light-hearted lad should fancy the lines, "Spirit of Night," for a musical setting. This short song embodied a vivid impression gathered on a moonlight night in my sister's garden at Carisbrook, amid the warm country silence, somewhat ghostly in feeling, and it should have been the last thing to appeal to a child in his 'teens; but Noel liked to hear of its origin, highly delighted that he had captured the solemnity, the inexplicable mystery which had held my mind on that quiet night.

Next he wanted to know about the mechanics of my work, how did I actually put my thoughts on paper, and these inquiries led us to my study, to see my Braille machine and my typewriter. I wrote him a sample letter in each system, which he took away as a souvenir. I explained how all my work first went down in the Braille system, from which I afterwards copied it on the typewriter. After my demonstration Noel asked to try the Braille machine, and in a minute or two he was trying his hand at writing his own name in our precious dots, and asking a host of intelligent questions about the invention, its originator, and its spread through the world of the blind. He roguishly congratulated all blind school-boys on their immunity from blots—perhaps he had some experience behind him in that.

With the instincts of a teacher, I thoroughly relished holding forth to such a good listener, and before we had tea he had also tapped out a few lines on my portable typewriter, just for the fun of it.

Mrs Mewton Wood and her son left me with the promise that I should have copies of OUR songs; and before they went overseas that promise was redeemed, and I have the manu-

scripts as a memento of that very happy hour we spent together.

Since then I have heard Noel playing from the B.B.C., London, and there are frequent accounts of his success from the musical world, although the incidence of the war must be holding him back considerably. When I met him as a boy I felt he was destined for fame, and I await the day, war ended, when he shall reach his full height as a virtuoso, and perhaps a new composer of importance.

## War and Its Clouds

During my lifetime our nation has had to face the sorrows of several wars. I was still a child when the Soudan campaign was fought, and the death of Gordon of Khartoum is just a faint memory. Then came the Boer War, and our pride in the exploits of our Australian Light Horse upon the African veld; but the reality of war's death and destruction did not dawn upon me fully, perhaps because of the fact that none of my family had reached the age for active service. But when the first world war broke over us, it was a different matter. Six of my nephews volunteered, two Aults from the home of my eldest sister at Durham Ox, two Lintons, sons of my sister Sophia, at Carisbrook, and two sons of my brother, Will.

We were proud to be so well represented, and sent our boys off with comparatively light hearts, and with our blessing and good hopes for their return crowned with the glory and honors of ultimate victory.

I was engaged in my school all through that war, and had little time for any special war work; however, we got the children knitting, even a few of the boys learning to turn out a passable sock, as well as washers and scarves, and other articles which needed but slight supervision. My own contribution was a pair of socks a week for the whole period of the conflict.

Then shadows dimmed the bright outlook concerning our nephews. Edwin Ault and Will Linton were posted as missing—most terrible announcement of all for those who wait the return of a soldier. My sisters could not accept this as final, and they searched and searched for something more definite, hoping, dreaming, praying, longing, that the lost

ones would somehow, somewhere, be found and restored to their homes again. Amelia (Mrs Ault) never settled down, never accepted the fact that her son was dead. She would write letters to any man of whom she heard that he had been in Edwin's battalion, bidding him to brush up his memory in case some trifling spark of recollection of her own lad might be rekindled. As I recall this fruitless agony of my sister my heart overflows with pity for the thousands of women who are receiving the same bitter word, "Missing," concerning their beloved soldiers of this present war.

Not until years after the war had ended did anything more definite come to hand. A man who escaped the holocaust of the landing day on Gallipoli saw Edwin surrounded by about a dozen Turks, madly laying about him with his trenching tool, and it is a foregone conclusion that he died in that hour.

Of Will Linton we also heard the end in due time. Victor Ault met, at a soldiers' reunion, a man who had been with Will in the ship as it lay off Gallipoli a few weeks after the first landing, and he said that the boat in which the company was being thrust ashore was shelled and sunk, and that our young kinsman was one of those who did not reach the beach, but was drowned in the blue Ægean Sea.

The story of Arthur was another affair. He was in the twelfth Field Ambulance on service in France. When I was on a cruise up north, I met a gentleman who had been a member of Arthur's unit, and he gave me some particulars about him. My nephew had been sharing in the conduct and production of the regimental paper, and had written some very lively articles for the magazine. Before his enlistment he had begun to do little freelance jobs, and showed more than usual promise in this field. The blow came in an action near Ypres, I think it was. They were bringing in the wounded and a shell exploded far too near. He died of his injuries next morning, sending loving messages of triumphant courage to



his father and mother, which were forwarded in a letter from his superior officer. He was buried in one of the war cemeteries in France—the only one of our three lost boys who has a known grave. Whenever I visit the Shrine of Remembrance here I feel that this beautiful and solemn edifice belongs to me, since it is the place where I can grow pensive, thinking of my kinsmen and their sacrifices for me and the other women of Australia.

## A WOMAN TO THE SHRINE

*With acknowledgments to the "Woman's World"*

One quenched in depth of blue Ægean Sea,  
 The other broken, mingled with the sod  
 Of ancient, sunlit, far Gallipoli,  
 The mortal perished, and their souls with God.

No graves are theirs where I may softly tread,  
 And cast a wistful glance, or drop a tear;  
 I cannot plant a garden o'er my dead,  
 Or claim a sacred spot to memory dear.

Yet, on a hill that breasts our sunny skies,  
 With crowning dome and stately portals wide,  
 The Shrine upon its lap of verdure lies,  
 In memory of our sons who fought and died.

These founding rocks, these pillars set apart,  
 These storied marbles in their sombre sheen,  
 All that sunk stone, the Temple's very heart—  
 What do this lordly Fane and Altar mean?

No piled-up vanity of human skill,  
 No waste of wealth, since workmen built the walls!

Only a place where love may linger still,  
A pensive wanderer in its echoing halls.

And there may I and other women go  
For pause to think upon our loved and lost,  
This holy spot the only grave we know,  
Of those who bought our peace at such a cost.

(Anzac Day, 1936.)

Writing in the spring of 1944, I am conscious that the present war has affected me less poignantly in a personal way. Perhaps I am happier in my individual life than I was at the time of the last upheaval, or it may be that, with added years, I have a better perspective of values. Then, the new generation of my family has been reared, in most cases, outside the inner circle of my contacts, for they have lived in the country or else too deeply absorbed in the pursuits of youth to spare much time for Great Auntie.

Nearly a dozen of them have answered the call to the services, both boys and girls, and are scattered all over the war front, in Army, Navy, and Air Force. So far none have made the supreme sacrifice, but they are all doing their duty to the nation.

Meanwhile at home I have taken up the one war job of which I am capable now, knitting, and getting others to knit. Some of our blind folk have gone forth into general industry, to lend a hand in the manpower problem, and are doing surprisingly well in very unexpected places; but for a woman of my years any such course was out of the question, so I took up work for the Red Cross almost from the commencement of the strife. I know that other blind women were anxious to help, too, and I got in touch with headquarters, and through the officers there was put on the scent of a good supply of wool for my band of knitters.

At first Mr Neale, of the Tweedside Woollen Mills, offered to let us have some wool, which had been donated to the Red Cross by the recreation club of that firm. For a long time this supply was unfailing, and the splendid parcels of work went forward in the joint names of the Mill Club and the blind women of The Association for the Advancement of the Blind.

Then the introduction of rationing put a stop to this bountiful supply of knitting yarn, and I went once more to headquarters. The late Mrs Geoffrey Wood was in charge then, and she asked me if we could possibly undertake the unripping of misfits, and get the wool worked up into satisfactory garments. Miss Bradford, who stands by me in all such enterprises, offered to help, and we began to receive great parcels of queer-looking articles in knitwear, which we unripped, skeined, and washed the wool, and prepared it for knitting and distributed to the workers. In this way we have salvaged nearly three hundred pounds worth of wool, besides relieving the Red Cross of one of its little problems, and I am very proud to record that the goods we sent back are received with complete satisfaction by the staff, and the acknowledgments are always accompanied by a note of commendation.

This special job, though insignificant in itself, uses up a lot of time, but it will go on as long as there is bad knitting to recondition. Often I get some fun out of it as well. Extraordinary at times are the garments we get, doubtless coming from children or from sadly inexperienced knitters. Imagine a pullover for a gentleman 64 inches round the bust, gloves with fingers six inches long, Balaclavas large enough to hold two heads, or the reverse, just big enough for a toddler's bonnet. One day I had a couple of Air Force boys to visit me just when a consignment arrived from headquarters, so we had a dress rehearsal, and it did us all good to share the uproarious mirth of the laddies.

It is good to laugh in these hard times, even if it is at the expense of having to knit over pounds and pounds of wool

through the errors and mishaps of some young or old dear, and every comfortable garment I make, or get made by blind friends, brings a glow of pleasure at its completion, since there is a hope that it will also bring a physical glow to some dear soldier in the front line, or to one suffering in hospital or in prison camp afar.

And now I want to grow confidential with the readers by telling them something of the letter friends I have had in the Forces, for in this way I have had many little thrills. First among them is Brigadier S. H. Porter, whom I knew before he enlisted. He went away with the rank of Major, right at the beginning of the war, fought through the Syrian campaign, and was wounded by a sniper somewhere near Lebanon. Later he was swept back to this homeland of his, just to pass on to New Guinea after a week-end with his wife and small son. Then he led his men over the Owen Stanley Range, and on to that victorious end, gaining promotion all the way, which was added to the D.S.O. won in Syria. Whenever he could find time he sent me a friendly letter, always interesting, assuring me of his continued remembrance of his blind friend at Windsor. Being an outstanding leader of men he has had plenty of experience in training and building up the reinforcements, and for a time was on administration work, doing something in Papua towards the restoration of the country. I know he would enjoy this, for he was eloquent in the praise of the Fuzzywuzzy, and the services rendered by the native race to the men of the Services.

Another highly appreciated correspondent was my cousin, Colonel Jack Herbertson, D.S.O., now Director of Water Transport for the Mainland and Northern Islands of Australia. He was an artillery officer, and well into the African campaign and its desert fighting. He is just a trifle proud of being a Tobruk Rat, and one of his letters to me was written while he was blockaded there in the siege. He also spent a good deal of time in Palestine and can talk for hours of



the historic places of the Bible, of the communal farms of the Jewish settlers, of the great monastery where he lodged for a time, and of Jerusalem, Nazareth, Tiberias, and of the new Zionist city of Tel Aviv. Many people travel and see things, but not all can write or talk intelligently of what they have seen. Cousin Jack is not of the unseeing eye, and his letters made me think how fortunate I had been in my correspondents.

I had a third soldier friend, who was a good letter writer. This was Lance-Corporal T. H. Merrett, of Western Australia, introduced to me as a correspondent by our mutual friend, Flying-Officer C. E. Kerville. Mr Merrett was not personally acquainted with me, never having met me before he went overseas. Our exchange of letters lasted for several years. At first he wrote from Palestine, from whence he sent me a souvenir of the Bethlehem shell-cutters' work in the form of a pendant. Just about the time I received it we had a record broadcast of this industry going on in the Bethlehem markets, and I wondered if it were my pendant being made at the time of the recording. Mr Merrett was struck down in Greece with grievous wounds and wrote from there as soon as he was able. Next he was taken to a prison camp in Germany and was able still to get an occasional card through to me by the channels of the Red Cross. In this camp were some of the blinded men to whom the Marquis of Normanby proved a veritable godfather; and my letter friend, who had some association with the work, gave me a first-hand account of the efforts made to begin the rehabilitation of these handicapped men. Finally Lance-Corporal Merrett was among those prisoners of war exchanged towards the end of 1943, and was repatriated to Australia, came to Melbourne for a course of plastic surgery, and we met for the first time.

During my life I have often indulged in friendly correspondence with people whom I never expected to meet in the flesh, and always I have conceived a mental picture of such



persons, not so much of the physical parts, face, form, and figure, but of the mental and spiritual qualities likely to be revealed on closer acquaintance at meeting, and of the voice and demeanour resulting from the general character of the unknown. Now here was an opportunity of testing my estimate of a fellow being from his letters, and I was more than interested to find how correct it had been. Mr Merrett's talk was as good as his letters and, whatever he may feel about his Melbourne Marianne, as any lady correspondent of a soldier is called in the French Army, his Marianne congratulates herself on having had such luck with him, as with my two other principal correspondents in the Forces.

THE WIDOW

The storm had passed, the lightning sword was sheathed,  
The drumming thunders that had racked her soul  
Were still, and on my breast she softly breathed  
The sorrow now to be her lifelong dole.

So young, so sweet, to walk the world alone!  
Fair as a summer cloud, and formed to rise  
On loving wings of lightest zephyr blown,  
The happy child of ever-shining skies.

The clouds of dark Papua where he fought  
And died, the glory of her life have quenched;  
Of all her precious dreams there lingers nought  
But battered hopes and memories sorrow drenched.

"Without my love," she whispered, "joy is dead!"  
I pressed her hand, and kissed her shining hair—  
No word of comfort was there to be said,  
Only my mother instinct's silent prayer.

For years have made me wise, and taught me much,  
How time assuages grief and smothers woe,  
Soothing each throbbing wound with healing touch;  
And I am glad, since God ordains it so.

Upon this tortured heart I dare not press  
This wisdom I have won—she, too, must wait,  
And win her garden from the wilderness  
Left by the raging storm within her gate.

## An Australian Family

Among the blind children whom I took for private instruction in their own homes, perhaps the most delightful was Lorna Wood. She was the daughter of Mr and Mrs Wood, who came with their family to reside not far from my home in Moonee Ponds; and when I was invited to become her tutor, I gladly accepted the work. I found this young girl very bright in disposition and alert in mind, easy to instruct, with her responsive eagerness to learn. Our studies were those of the upper grades in the ordinary school, to which I added music and singing and some simple handicrafts such as knitting and raffia weaving.

We had happy times together over our lessons, and it was a joy to see her develop along the lines most dear to me. She had individuality, natural capacity for organisation, personal charm, and a very companionable way with her. In a conversation with Captain C. H. Peters, who had seen a good deal of Lorna in her late girlhood as a friend of the family, he also remarked on this quality of delightful camaraderie. It was no wonder, therefore, that at the conclusion of our business arrangement neither of us wished to end our intimacy. Its continuance was made all the easier by the marked friendliness of Lorna's people, from the father and mother down to the smallest brother, George. So I went on visiting there, and later, when Mr Wood gave up his business as manager of the taxi company and removed to Koorinal Park, near Moyhu, I spent many holidays in their happy country home.

I have always felt that this family, as I knew it at Koorinal Park, was so typically Australian that I love to recall our doings there, and to recount the tales of the life they lived and in which I shared at periods. The house was large, and

room could be found for city friends, whose interest was kept lively by the work and play always going on.

Lorna and I could always find a sunny verandah, where we sat with our knitting, discussing books, blind affairs, and the world in general, while Teddy, Lorna's little black Pomeranian dog, frisked in and out of the garden beyond.

Near us was the large cage of the African grey parrot to whom the boys taught rude remarks for repetition to the various members of the household. In a day or two this remarkable bird learned to bid me good morning by name, or he would advise Auntie Clare, another visitor at the time I was there, to "put more water in it!" Jokes were perpetually on the round, and we all laughed together as the family gathered at meals and related the adventures of the day.

Sometimes we went the round of the farm stables, where the young racehorse, Garonwy, was cared for, and where Violet, the slow old plough mare, nosed contentedly among her oats: I have never known people who were kinder to their animals, and there were plenty of them, from the herd of ninety Jerseys to the Irish Setter, Murphy, and her litter of lovely puppies. Victor, the big cat, was not quite so popular, for he would get his head into the big milk-jug in a twinkling if nobody chanced to be there to stop him; all the same Victor's faults were condoned, and he went on with his mousing from day to day.

At Koorungal Park I saw a good silo for the first time, into which much sweet and fragrant maize from the river flats had gone, to come out in great cakes of ensilage smelling like yeast buns and sugar loaves, delectable to the stock at any time.

And the family! It consisted of father and mother, four boys of varying ages, and Lorna and her younger sister, Sadie. One must include Auntie, who was not actually a blood relation, Miss Emma Jobbins, who had some means of her own, but who loved to share in the bringing up of the children and

in the management of the big house. There was Margaret, the cook, a quaint Irish soul who disapproved of telephones because there was a devil in them, and objected to ladies going into her kitchen when a domesticated visitor proposed to make up the melons into jam. Margaret snorted, as she remarked that it was not what the gentry did in her parts, and retired for the afternoon in high dudgeon. Like many of her compatriots she was not without wit and had a decided personality. One day, when Mrs Wood asked if she would not like to attend Mass now and then, and offered to have her driven to the church, Margaret's response was: "And is it me soul you are thinking of? Well, there are more ways to Heaven than one!" We used to get plenty of fun out of Margaret, and her ways of managing the family.

Pearce was the man about the yard, but he was not sociable like the reigning monarch of the kitchen; consequently I did not make his acquaintance save in a general way. He would drive Violet up and down a small plot of land beside the garden, and we could hear his "Whoa, Violet," every time he turned the corner, and our amusement was great when we heard the parrot shouting "Whoa, Violet!" in tones which imitated those of Pearce so perfectly that the difference could hardly be detected.

But Ah Cooke, a Chinese to whom Mr Wood had leased a piece of land down near the river for the cultivation of tobacco, was quite a figure in the family life. Daily he came up to the house with a load of fresh garden stuff for the vigorous appetites of the Woods and their hungry guests.

The wise old Chow kept his place warm with conciliating gifts to Lorna or such a visitor as myself—a water-melon, a few late strawberries, a packet of rare Chinese sweets or candied cumquats. Lorna was his special favourite, for she could always find time for a joke or friendly greeting for him, or for the indulgence of his horse with a lump of sugar. From his New Year visits to Melbourne he would return with



a present all round. Quaint at times were these tokens. To the boys he once brought tins of boot polish, and to Lorna and Sadie some soap and tooth paste. Once, when in the city he had consulted a Chinese doctor about a rheumatic ailment in the foot, which had prevented Lorna from attending a dance with her brothers, and had brought back a remedy for the trouble which he declared to be infallible. This was his home-coming gift for Lorna.

Thus, in fun and laughter, in little experiments in riding under the tuition of one of the boys, with music in the evenings, cards or conversation, long, restful nights terminated by the screams of cockatoo and the fluting of magpie, passed many happy holidays at Koorinal Park, under the protection of this truly delightful family. Then one day came the news that Lorna was dead. Her sister Sadie had died a year or two earlier, and now the lovely home atmosphere was deprived of the other, and the sorrowing mother of both her girls.

My beloved pupil had not been quite well for a time, and the symptoms becoming more grave, her father had driven her to see the doctor at Wangaratta, only to learn that the disorder was serious. She entered the hospital, and fell into coma, passing away in eleven days.

What a blow it was to her people I can imagine, for I, too, was saddened beyond expression. I had loved her as a younger sister, and rejoiced in her qualities. She had been the active spirit in the home, remembering where others forgot, doing her father's business typing, clever, kind, and lovable; it had always given me joy to know that a blind woman of her calibre would help to create in our community a better understanding of the capabilities of the blind.

As the years pass, I continue to meet some of the family from time to time, and I still feel that those young men, her brothers, are largely what they are, for having had a sister like Lorna.

## Governors' Ladies

In the course of my public work to advance the cause of the blind in this State, I have been privileged to meet many of the wives of our Governors. Several of these occasions have been of a slightly more intimate character than is general in the polite and formal exchange of the "How do you do" of the official function, and, as such meetings have given me a certain amount of personal pleasure I think an account of them may not be out of place in these pages.

About the year 1909 the Association for the Advancement of the Blind was busy inaugurating its home at Brighton Beach. We had taken "Woodburn," a comfortable old home in Mair street, where we had installed as working matron Miss Margaret Thomson, with a few of the more pressing cases of homelessness under her care. Mr Paterson had discovered this house for us, and Mr Charles Monteath, my other co-trustee, had introduced me to some of Melbourne's business firms, from whom I solicited and obtained many donations in money and furnishings. Mr Paterson and his friends set the place in order, and we had been able to start the work, which still continues on the same spot, although in a greatly expanded building.

No official opening had taken place, however, and this was still pending when my friend, Miss Lila Holt, found an opportunity of aiding us. She was for a time in charge of the post-office at Macedon Upper, and sometimes met Lady Carmichael when the Vice-Regal family was in residence at Government Cottage.

When on a visit to Miss Holt I was chatting about our plans and how we would like to have an opening party at "Woodburn" very soon, and thought of inviting the Governor's lady

to perform the ceremony. Miss Holt mentioned this to Lady Carmichael, and a week or two later I received a summons to go to "Stonnington" for an interview with her ladyship.

Unaccustomed to Vice-Regal society, I was, naturally, a trifle flustered, but I need not have been with such a gracious lady as my hostess. I was shown into her boudoir, and we talked for about an hour, she asking many searching questions, and I giving in reply the reasons why such a home was desirable in this community to care for our aged and infirm blind, often homeless, and without friends or kindred to cherish them.

Tea was brought in, and Lady Carmichael poured out and served me and my niece, Anne, as we pursued the theme of my visit.

Sir Thomas came in while we were busy with our cups and his wife asked, "Tea, Tom?"

"Tea? No," he replied, and I rather suspected that His Excellency had other ideas on the subject of suitable refreshment, and he left the room at once.

At the conclusion of the interview, Lady Carmichael gave me a smiling, kindly promise to perform the official opening of our Home, and in addition sent me away pleased and gratified with a gift of beautiful roses.

In after years I heard something more about those roses. A blind friend of mine told me the story. Her sister had been a maid at Government House at the time, and had been present when the gardener brought in the bouquet to be taken up to her Ladyship. Of course, the girls went into raptures over the flowers, as I did later, but the gardener was doleful, indeed he was just a little resentful about it all. "Yes," he said, "they are fine blooms, some of my best; but isn't it a shame! They are for a blind lady, and she won't be able to appreciate them. Just wasted!"

Well the proud and conservative gardener did not know everything—I carried home my lovely flowers, cherished them

until they shed their red, gold, and white petals, and then tied the sweet remnants in a silk bag, which lay for many years among my ribbons and laces.

In the four years that followed the opening in 1910, we had to get money to buy and extend the home at "Woodburn." The Lord Mayor gave us his patronage, and an appeal was made, bringing the necessary funds to add a new wing. This provided us with the occasion for another opening party, and we invited Lady Denman, wife of the Federal Governor, to do the honors.

I was teaching at the time, but I believe the event took place on a Saturday, so I ventured out into public once more. When having afternoon tea in the marquee, I was seated by Lady Denman, and among other topics mentioned was an exhibition of antiques being held at Government House. I remarked that at such shows blind visitors got very little pleasure, because the exhibits were usually under glass, or at least, not to be touched by the public. Lady Denman said, "Would you like to see my exhibition?"

Of course I would.

"Then," she answered, "if you will come at half-past two next Thursday afternoon, I shall be there myself and show you just whatever you would like to handle."

This created a dilemma for me, but it was a tempting offer and I decided to play the wag from school—the first and only time—and, of course, I lost a half day's pay for doing so.

At Government House I found Her Excellency waiting for me. We went the round of the ballroom together, and things were taken from their cases, old French dolls, Persian slippers, Indian embroideries, and many other quaint and curious objects.

She must have given me an hour and it proved very interesting, apart from the flattery of having so distinguished a guide. I recall her amusement because I discovered a small chain missing from the shoe of a model French dandy. Evi-



dently she was not accustomed to the keen and observant fingers of the blind, but I think she enjoyed the afternoon as much as did her guest.

My next intimate contact with a Vice Regal Lady was, I believe, with Lady Helen Ferguson. One day, for some reason, there was a holiday at school, and I decided to have a blow on Brighton Beach, and to drop in for a call on some of the inmates of the home who liked to see me, especially Miss Graham, who was deaf and blind, and loved a half-hour of finger talk with anyone who knew the alphabet. It just filled her with ecstasy when I could sit beside her and write upon her hand the bits of news, and anything fresh in the crochet line.

This day I made my way to her room, but she was not there. I walked around to find her, and came upon the inmates gathered in the dining-room, with Lady Helen reading aloud to them from some interesting book. I sat down quietly, so as to minimise the interruption, till, at the end of the reading, she came over to me and asked some questions about myself and my work. She said that, if the management of the school would send her an invitation, she would visit us. I duly delivered the message, but Lady Ferguson never came to the school.

On yet another occasion I accidentally met her at the Brighton home, where she often went to read to the inmates. After her return to Britain she wrote to them sometimes, particularly to Miss Graham, and it was always apparent that her womanly heart quite overruled the official graciousness of the Governor's wife and the first Lady of the land.

Lady Stradbroke once came to my school, and chatted in a most friendly way with both teachers and children. She had a working knowledge of the Braille system, and had done some transcribing for The National Library for the Blind in London. She was a most understanding woman, as far as children were concerned, which is easily explained by the size of her own family.



Perhaps in a less intimate fashion I met Lady Dugan, when she graciously consented to open a fair, which I and my blind women friends organised to reduce the debt on our clubhouse at Kooyong. Her presence and patronage meant so much to us, and when the opening was over I had the pleasure of presenting to her the conveners of the stalls, blind ladies with one exception, and it was charming to note her kindly reception of each.

The last incident I shall record in this connection relates to my meeting with Lady Huntingfield. As president of our Association of the Blind I received a card for an at-home at Government House, tendered as a farewell to the heads of all the bodies to which she had granted her patronage.

Now I wanted to go, but I could not manage a function like that without an attendant, for the place and people would all be strangers to me. Once again it seemed like a dilemma, then I thought, "If I were Lady Huntingfield, and she were in my position, I should be quite willing to smooth out such a difficulty for her." I could not credit her with less kindness than myself, so I wrote to her, explaining the matter, and asking if I might be accompanied by my friend, Mrs F. W. Bond, who was already on some of their invitation lists. The immediate response was a card for Mrs Bond.

On the appointed day we took a taxi to the Vice Regal home, perhaps a little too early, as I was anxious not to be arriving with the crowd. I was soon quite comfortable. The first to greet us after the hostess was Mr W. H. Edgar, M.L.C., with his wife. Mrs Edgar had spent some of her childhood in my native town of Carisbrook, and said she had often seen me there and had spoken to me sometimes. Her husband was a very old friend, too. He brought many of the guests up to our group for introductions, including Sir Isaac Isaacs and Mrs Zwar. This lady also claimed a former acquaintance, having met me at Beechworth when I visited that town in the interests of the Braille Library.

We were busy exchanging notes, when Lady Huntingfield came along and took the chair beside me. After greeting everybody, she said: "Well, Miss Aston, let me congratulate you on your good sense in wearing opals."

I have some fine stones, and donned them for so important an occasion. She explained that the opal was Lord Huntingfield's jewel, as he was born in Queensland, and that he had given her an opal to take back to England as a memento of their stay in this country. She then had a closer look at my ornaments and said they were beautiful, and she laid her hand in mine that I might examine her ring. It was not a very large piece, but of the rarer black variety, surrounded with small diamonds, and must have been good to look at. She remarked how foolish it is to suppose that the wearing of such a lovely gem could bring bad luck, and I agreed, for I had worn mine for about thirty years.

Next she inquired if anyone had described the flowers adorning the room, and proceeded to paint a realistic word picture for me. I remember that the flowers were tall delphiniums, arranged in large jars fanwise against the walls, alternating with palms or golden blooms of some sort.

Her Ladyship came back more than once, to see that I was having the best attention from the tea-trays, and at the conclusion of the party I carried away with me the sense of having met one of the most charming women I am ever likely to meet, a pattern hostess for any grade of society. This party gave me much secret satisfaction—it had proved that, in spite of my handicap, in spite of no special training in the way of Vice Regal circles, I could still maintain my poise, share in social intercourse of the kind, and enjoy the entertainment perhaps better than those who receive numerous invitations.

Gracious ladies were these Governors' wives, able to adapt themselves to all people and all circumstances. May the genus be ever forthcoming, when such are needed to serve as leaders for the women of our vast and cosmopolitan empire.

## Ramadanovich of Yugoslavia

In the days of my eager search after information concerning the blind of other lands, through the medium of Esperanto I got into touch with a gentleman of Yugoslavia, whom I consider one of the most eminent workers for our cause, as he was an original thinker in his plans and efforts to ameliorate the lot of the sightless in the Russian and Balkan regions. This was Mr Velkjo Lj. Ramadanovich, director of The Blind Institution at Zemun, near Belgrade. Like myself, he was always on the watch for any exchange of ideas, and soon after the conclusion of the first war began a correspondence with me, having read an account of my doings in one of the Esperanto papers then in circulation throughout Europe. I quickly discovered his remarkable qualities, his wide philanthropic interests, his readiness to blaze new trails for aiding the sightless, for whom he thought and worked. His story, which I learned from one of his staff of blind teachers, was a romantic one.

As a young man Velkjo had wandered about the Balkans and into Russia, not at all clear as to his mission and calling in life; then, one day, he found himself in an empty, quiet church, facing the responsibility of a decision concerning his future, and there, upon his knees before the altar, he received a revelation of God's purpose for him—he was to go out and become the protector and father of the weak and afflicted, and to devote his scholarship and great natural gifts to the cause of humanity.

Out into the world he went, toiling for many causes as they presented themselves—the deaf mutes, the crippled children, the aged and infirm. Finally, the needs of the blind in those eastern European countries were thrust upon his great heart,

and he turned his talents in that direction, to the exclusion of other spheres of active work. He settled in Yugoslavia, and at Zemun founded the school and workshop for the blind, bringing to bear upon the project all his fine powers of organisation, and a liberal understanding of the viewpoint of those whom he desired to uplift. Very soon he had a Braille printing press installed, from which poured out books, music, magazines, to supply the needs of the starved readers of that part of the world. He introduced Esperanto, and encouraged his blind charges to study through this auxiliary language the history and literature of other peoples, and, as a part of their training, urged his teachers to get in touch with workers among the blind wherever a contact could be made.

Mr Ramadanovich was a linguist, and knew English, therefore he could use any press matter I was able to send him, such as local reports and newspaper cuttings. These he would translate, and give to the press over there, and in this way his Australian correspondent became known in Yugoslavia to a group of people interested in the blind movement.

Many matters of interest came my way from this part of Europe, but perhaps the most remarkable was the astonishing experiment of setting up blinded soldiers on the land. Mr Ramadanovich had a theory that men reared in agricultural surroundings would be more likely to succeed at farming than at a trade in a workshop, when overtaken by loss of sight. They would require some financial help and a certain amount of rehabilitation training, after which he hoped they might become self-supporting. So he secured a tract of land near the town of Novi Sad, had homes built in a little village for fifty blinded soldiers, and in due course settled them there as small farmers, with tools, live stock, and other necessary equipment. The last report received showed that the experiment had been a success.

There is a delightful story connected with this unusual venture. The wise Ramadanovich knew that blind men could



not manage this kind of life without womenfolk, so he and his wife shouldered the responsibility of finding wives for those who had none.

Advertisements appeared in the papers for girls accustomed to farm life and willing to share with the blind men the task of founding homes and families with the prospect of a fair amount of economic security. It would seem that this was a pleasing prospect, for plenty of young women answered the call, many times the number of applicants needed. Mrs Ramadanovich chose the twenty-five brides, explained to them fully the duties ahead, and put them through a brief course of training with the blind at the institution at Zemun. Dowries for the girls were provided, and finally there was a glorious peal of wedding bells, and twenty-five couples were united before the altar.

In spite of gloomy predictions, this marriage experiment proved quite successful—in 1937 the settlement was flourishing, some of the men had accumulated handy little nest-eggs, and there were seventy-six happy children, all born at Veternik, as the village had been named by Mr Ramadanovich.

This outstanding man, with his large heart, keen brain, and friendly understanding of his charges, became a much sought-after counsellor in every department of humane effort. In Poland, Russia, Rumania, in fact all over the Balkan States, he was called upon to solve the problems of many handicapped classes. Decorations and honors have been bestowed on him by many Governments, and he seems to have had the love and confidence of those about him. According to a photograph which he sent to me he is handsome and dignified, and his countenance would seem to indicate a benign and fatherly spirit. Just before the present war he completed forty years of service to mankind and twenty-five as the guardian of the interests of the blind of Yugoslavia. To celebrate the occasion, there was printed a memorial book dealing with his vari-



MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

ous philanthropies, a tribute to a life of devotion and self-sacrifice for others. Among the pictures appearing in this book is one of myself, included because I was for years a faithful letter friend of this distinguished benefactor of my fellow blind. Now that war has ravaged the world, I have lost touch with him and his work. I can only pray that such a splendid man has escaped the fire and sword of the ruthless factions of this European debacle.

## Continued Leadership of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind

Under this heading I shall try to state some particulars, intended to clear away the impression that, during a long period of its history, I had nothing to do with the above-named Association. I have already referred to the request of the chief of my department, when I was engaged as teacher, that I should abstain from public work for any organisation of the blind, so as to obviate the opposition met at the time of my appointment. Actually I did refrain from taking prominent part in my former work, but my influence was well sustained throughout the thirteen years I was in the school. It is not always essential to hold office in order to have a share in guiding State affairs, for the power behind the door can be very real, and it was in that domain I was able to help my old friends in many practical ways.

Prior to my appointment, however, I had been forced to somewhat lighten my duties outside the home, because of my mother's failing health; but other blind people were ready to step in and shoulder the burden. I was still a trustee, and this office I never relinquished; but immediately after the announcement of my successful application for the post of head-teacher at the Blind Institution through the Education Department, I made a disagreeable discovery, namely, that I was spoken of as a traitor, a deserter of those for whom I had worked for 17 years. The Institution where I was to begin duty was not popular with the blind of that day, for reasons which need not be discussed here, and apparently I was to share in its bad reputation, and come in for some amount of distrust and disfavour.

I was deeply hurt by this manifestation of hostility, which was least justified in those who were loudest in proclaiming it, for most of the blind who needed employment must depend on the Institution, whatever the disadvantages, while I was to hold an independent position as a Government servant, even if my working hours must be spent in the same building as theirs. In winning this appointment I had not supplanted any rival among the blind, so I hoped and expected that my success would have been a source of pride and pleasure to them.

Then the vociferous section found a leader, who had come quite recently into the ranks of the sightless, and set about burying the "Dead Monarch," to wit, myself, their founder and for long their leader. This was the more easily managed with the restraint that bound me in the background, which I could not explain to them fully, nor could they grasp my difficulty without such explanation. I tried to understand the situation from their point of view, excusing their loss of confidence in me for the time; but it added much to the trials and sorrows of my first year in the hostile camp. I cherished the hope that time would bring the balances into a true line, and prove to these fellow workers of mine that I was no deserter of their cause. I went to some of the meetings and had my little say on various matters before the chair, and ventured to proffer my opinions as heretofore.

I was soon to learn from the militant section that I was no longer wanted in, or out of, the meetings—they talked loudly of new blood being needed, new and more progressive policies which must be formulated, of fights and affrays with the old organisation to rectify wrongs, etc., etc. I was amazed at the fury this aggressive minority had stirred up. At last, one evening I was present at a meeting where a most unwise and futile step was advocated, and I arose to make a protest, as I considered it meant complete ruin for our young association. I was refused a hearing, and I left the gathering, sad and disappointed, not so much because my opinion was unaccept-

able, but because of the ingratitude and lack of courtesy I had a right to expect.

I retired, resolving not to thrust myself upon the members again, until time should make my situation clear to them, and till a more fraternal spirit should have blossomed forth above the suspicion and unreasonableness of this passing storm. Yet my heart was there, for I realised that this was just one of those queer upstirrings which often occur at the onset of a fresh, would-be leadership, at the entrance of a man grasping power rather than a modest ministry to the needs of his less fortunate fellows.

This little fracas disturbed our peace many years ago, and all who had a share in it either learned the wisdom of co-operation or vanished from our ranks altogether. It happened at a time when I had many troubles, and, possibly for that reason, looked very dark at the moment. I was enduring the opposition in my school work, also my mother's illness extended over this period, ending with her death in December. I held on to my membership of the Association, and to my office as trustee, and I determined that in some way I would go on helping. It was chiefly through this office I retained my hold during the years of teaching and long after. I quietly kept in touch with the loyal section of the workers, especially the trustees, who would come to my home that I might share in their deliberations, and help with such morsels of wisdom as experience had brought me. Nothing important was ever done without my knowledge, for it was the practice of the faithful among the members to drop in for a chat when there was an important matter likely to come up at the general meeting.

From the foregoing it may be judged how sound is my claim to have led this organisation continuously since I founded it, with my seven blind friends in December 1895. This is not the place for a complete history of its activities; suffice it to say that our home at Brighton grew larger, and,

more useful, we opened a hostel for women in Windsor, and one for men in South Yarra, while the needs of the blind in the north of the State were catered for by a small home at Bendigo.

The visiting system among the isolated blind was greatly expanded, social work, begun at our first annual picnic, has been fully matured in our socials, concerts, and other forms of enjoyment likely to brighten the lives of our people. The blind themselves did most of the work without any reward, save the satisfaction which always follows service.

After my retirement from the Education Department, many years of bad health prevented me from taking part in public life; so I went on as private stimulator and honorary consulting shut-in. Meanwhile, my name as an author was appearing more often in the Press, and people began to remember my former efforts in literature. Things were in this wise when Mr Marks intimated his desire to vacate the presidential chair. Mr George Maxwell, M.L.A., had held that post for a long period, and, at his death, Mr Marks had been elected to the office.

One day a deputation waited on me, and invited me to accept nomination, and, after careful thought, I agreed to stand, but only on condition that too much would not be expected, since my health was far from reliable. This was agreed to, the members stating that my small reputation would be of value, apart from any service I could render, and we settled down on these terms when I had been duly elected.

The work of most presidents is, perhaps, more ornamental than routine, and I set out to do my decorative job, with vice-presidents to help, and my blind and seeing friends to steady the load a little. The Association was in reality a brotherhood of the blind, with big plans for more work to come. We were providing hope and consolation, so much needed to minimise the physical handicap, often of quite recent oc-



currence, and the blind of this community have a much brighter lot for our efforts. How happy it makes me to remember that I have had a hand in this rehabilitation, this opening of the gates for my fellows in darkness! This happiness is all I have ever asked—however it has been augmented by a public recognition of my service to the community in the shape of the Distinguished Citizens' Decoration from the King, an honour twice bestowed, and which assuredly warmed my heart, and stirred me up to yet greater endeavours for my kind.

## Gates

Gates are made to keep things in,  
 What we have and what we win;  
 Made to guard the things we nourish,  
 Where life's best may grow and flourish—  
 Errant fancies here confined,  
 'Neath the outer world's cold eye—  
 Close the gate, the exit bar,  
 Small ambitions of the mind,  
 Simple loves that swoon and die  
 While we learn what things we are,  
 How to grip and hold on high  
 That lone being who is I.

Gates are made to keep at bay  
 Those destroyers who betray  
 Wanton will to crush and break  
 Every fair thing that we make,  
 Trampling down the growing plant,  
 Scorning our ideals as cant!  
 Love becomes a desert dry,  
 Where the thirsting soul may die.  
 Let them stay without the gate,  
 In the outer darkness wait!  
 He who parleys with the foe,  
 Sure defeat must later know.

Gates are made to let things out  
 To the masses round about;  
 Theirs, perchance, a garden drear,  
 Bedded on a rock austere;

MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

Precious dreams their grasp elude,  
Coarse realities intrude!  
Who shall satisfy their yearning,  
Squalor into beauty turning?  
Open, Gate, a roadway fair!  
We have riches and to spare!  
If a man will truly live,  
He must get and he must give.

## The Lure of the Tropics

Most of the children of my generation drew much enjoyment from reading of such books as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Coral Island* and I suppose that these tales of the tropics shed a glamor over such regions for us living as we did, in a clime where spices grew not, and where bread must be made from the much processed wheat instead of coming straight from the bread-fruit tree. So I had always longed to walk beneath coconut palms, to listen to the singing tides upon the coral reefs, and to touch and smell the fragrant plants that flourished under tropical suns. I had little hope of realising this romantic aspiration, with the two handicaps of blindness and limited means; but in the year of the coronation of our present King my opportunity came.

For twenty years I had paid a quarterly premium for insurance, and now I could claim the handsome sum of one hundred pounds. Wisdom said I ought to put this aside for a rainy day, for sickness or for old age, etc. Of course, this would have been the prudent way but, in view of the simple mode of my life on a small but assured income, I played on the idea of a trip to the north, and it gripped me so fast, that at length I decided to spend most of my slowly accumulated wealth on such a pleasure cruise.

I purchased tickets to Cairns and back by the motor ship *Manoora*, bought some necessary gala clothes, and prepared to enjoy myself. I was not disappointed. Miss Bradford was my companion on this excursion, and we both collected a store of experiences which have enriched us ever since.

I got in touch with Mrs Ryan, of the Queensland Tourist Bureau, and she must have laid a trail of friendly feelings towards me right up the east coast of Australia. It was truly

wonderful how easy the agents made the way for me, assisting me to participate in every excursion on the programme of the tour. When I got to Sydney, I was interviewed as a distinguished traveller by some of the papers, had a party in the city to meet my numerous cousins and friends, too scattered to look up individually in their homes, and finally Miss Bradford and I took a little sight-seeing on our own account before going back to the ship.

At Brisbane, through the kind interest of Mr Scott, secretary to the Blind People's Club, I received even more publicity. The newspapers came aboard the ship and photographed us and, by-the-way, there must have been an accident with this picture, for in the journal it showed me with a glorious black eye, much to our amusement. I sincerely trust that the readers did not imagine I had been "making whoopee" while far beyond the critical surveillance of my everyday circle.

Many people called on me, including Mrs Percy Pease, wife of the Acting Premier. This gracious lady came down to the boat for us, drove us round the city, gave us morning tea at Parliament House, where we were shown many historical relics, and inspected the beautiful floors and furnishing made of rare Queensland timbers. Next she drove us to the Forestry Department, to see the marvellous variety of woods produced in the State; and later in the day I received two lovely jewel boxes, made of native maple, as a souvenir from the Queensland Government. It was all very thrilling, after the life of comparative seclusion I had had for many years, and all this kindness was a definite refresher to my spirit.

In Brisbane I made a broadcast as a distinguished visitor, was tendered a complimentary social by the blind folk and the Esperantists combined, and met many delightful people whom I shall always remember with pleasure. Here, too, was the first touch of the tropics, noticeable in the trees and flowers, and in the milder airs of those mid-May days.



At last we set sail for the north, and I was so tired with my two days of gaiety and excitement in the northern capital, that I was glad to get to sea for a rest. It was during our stay there that I received a radiogram from Melbourne, informing me that I had been decorated with the King's Medal for a second time, in commemoration of the coronation of George the Sixth and Queen Elizabeth. We were sailing up the Barrier Reef when the ceremony of crowning the sovereign was broadcast from London but static spoiled the reception for us. The captain gave a coronation dinner and provided a souvenir menu card for each diner, with a dance to follow. This entertainment we enjoyed, sitting on the deck in the tropical evening, while the younger folk made merry in a broom dance, or acted as jockies for the deck horseracing.

On the ship I did not find the people very friendly. Blindness often produces that effect on strangers, who find it difficult to recognise the intelligent human being behind the darkened eyes, so I was not disturbed by it; a few of the old dears would sometimes venture to quiz Miss Bradford about me when I was out of the way. They would advise her that she ought to get my hair cut, as such long hair must be a terrible trouble for her to keep in order and do up for me. They also offered her congratulations on the nice way she dressed me, considering I was blind, and it must be very trying to have to do so much for me. My dear companion would grow indignant, protesting that I could do my own hair, dress myself, and generally care for my own needs as well as they could for themselves. The laugh was ours in the privacy of our cabin.

Two very interesting people I did meet on the ship. One was a quaint little gentleman from the goldfields of the north, Mr Richard Terrill. He was wont to rise early, and so were we, that we might get a walk before breakfast and blow off the flavor of below-decks. As the little gentleman would whizz around the promenade, he would meet us in passing with the

salute, "Hello, you flappers!" and we would give him back a laughing answer. Soon we became quite friendly, for he liked my opals. Anything from Queensland pleased him and, as he remarked, I was sensible enough to know a good thing when it came my way. Added to this, I liked papaw, a fruit in which he delighted, and which he advocated as being health giving as well. How trifling are the common grounds of a congenial contact by-the-way! He got off at Townsville, promising to call on us when he should be in Melbourne the following year but, before that happened, we saw an announcement of his death in the press.

After he disembarked, the purser told us he was a great man in the north, a generous philanthropist, especially in providing schools, that he was known all over the State, and had done much to develop its mining and other resources in the northern region. Odd in dress, and tiny of stature, he was rather a joke to the other passengers; but he made this portion of our trip more interesting than it would have been, since he knew the land and sea thereabouts, and the history of it as well, and was quite willing to talk about them to such friendly listeners as ourselves.

The other traveller of importance to me was Mrs Alice Jackson, editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly*. She was on a cruise with her children, and I had several conversations with her. She gave me a valuable write-up in her paper, and also invited me to contribute an article, giving my impressions of the tour. At Sydney, on my return journey, I made a broadcast in the session devoted to the interests of this paper, arranged while we were still sailing on the smooth smiling waters of the tropical sea. It was a great privilege to meet this charming though forceful woman, for she wields a tremendous influence all over this continent through the medium of her much-read and widely-circulated pages.

How I should like to linger over my visit to Magnetic Island, and the afternoon I spent at Palm Islands, with abori-

ginal people under the care of missionaries, nurses and teachers; how I should like to tell of the many helping hands that guided me on to launches and smaller boats, that I might enjoy the excursions with the other tourists! But I must be content to remember it all, even if no space can be spared for a written record of so much kindness.

We reached Cairns, and the same courtesy greeted me there. A long interview with me appeared in the social column of the Cairns paper, and I began to feel the reserve of my fellow passengers breaking down a little. We did the usual round of sights, and I met one or two old acquaintances, who had sought a home and fortune in that warmer clime. I breathed the tropic airs, heard the sea on the Reef, listened to the strange bird notes, handled the plants hitherto but a name to me, and ate as much tropical fruit as I fancied. Up into the jungle at Kuranda we went, and I perceived the voice of God in the mighty roar of the Barron Falls. If the other tourists got any more out of these things than I did, then they were fortunate indeed.

At last we set sail for the south. I had arranged to get off at Mackay, to spend a week with my friends, Mr and Mrs Riddell, and to catch the next boat coming down from Cairns. The happy week there had, in addition to the pleasure of meeting Howard's bride for the first time, the chance of becoming acquainted with some of the Queenslanders in their own homes, and a certain amount of novelty of other kinds.

Here we walked in the cane fields that give us so much of our sugar, and heard of the rats and death adders that sometimes hide there; we prowled in the bush among strange vegetation, drove through an avenue of mango trees, and examined the bananas on the plant in a garden surrounding a kanaka's house. In this garden also grew the sweet potato and the rosella fruit, the large yellow guava and the prickly pineapple. How democratic were all the people we met! They went fishing, and brought us their offerings of unlimited whit-

ing—such luxury; their fruit would be found on our doorstep sometimes. Such cordiality made me long to linger among them, but the day arrived for our departure.

We boarded the launch, and glided out into the ocean near Flat Top Island, where we had to meet the ship Canberra. It had not come in sight when we got there, so we pulled in behind the Isle for shelter, as the sea was beginning to rise. It was dark before the Canberra appeared, stealing towards us like a ghost out of the sea. It was growing cold, too, and mounting waves were rocking our little platform of a launch. When the steamer drew up beside us, the waves were swooping up her sides, and falling back in terrifying flops between the two vessels. Down came the gangway above this turmoil, and the launch captain protested that it was dangerous, shouting that he had a blind lady to put aboard. No notice was taken of his objection—then followed a scene which, but for its tragic possibilities, was one of the funniest I have ever been called upon to share. The mate of the steamer would not give in, neither would our little Maltese captain. He shouted and swore, but the men up above continued to carry out their orders, and prepared to get us up the gangway, in spite of its broad swing up and down above us. I was seized by two men ready to be pushed up to two of the sailors, whenever the movement of both vessels should make a contact possible. The next thing I knew was that I was lying flat on the launch, where I had been flung, and the Maltese skipper was dancing, shrieking mad, and hurling fierce invective at the men on the ship. He pulled the launch away, and refused to load any more. I learned that the end of the gangway had come down, with all the weight of the steamer behind it, just where I was standing and, had the men not been quick in throwing me backwards, I must have been crushed by its weight, or pushed into the turbulent water at our feet. After that we waited while the gangway was taken up, and that on the sheltered side of the steamer lowered for us; the launch steamed round



there, and we transhipped quite comfortably both passengers and luggage. To those looking on, it had been a moment of terror. I received plenty of sympathy and congratulation, received credit for keeping calm in such great peril, but it must be confessed that, not until afterwards, did I realise the extent of the danger which I had escaped. As soon as we got to our cabin, the good-natured stewardess set about offering friendly consolation. I suffered no ill effects from this affair, but Miss Bradford, who witnessed the incident, was troubled for a long time over what might have happened, and enjoyed little more of the trip.

Rough weather set in on our way down. A terrific cyclone between Brisbane and Sydney made the going heavy indeed, and no one could get up for meals. I managed to consume some turkey by gripping the berth with one hand, and feeding myself in the primitive forkless fashion. We were glad to reach the Harbor City and to go ashore for some food in peace. The broadcast arranged for the *Women's Weekly* was given, and my cousin Jack Herbertson drove us round the resorts and watering-places. At last we came outside Port Phillip Heads one morning before dawn, where the sea was blanketed with fog, and we were forced to wait outside for eight hours, until visibility was good enough to permit a safe passage through the "Rip" and up the bay to the city port. I need not say that our homecoming gave us as much satisfaction as our setting forth had given. Into five weeks had been crowded as much excitement and adventure as usually came my way in as many years. I had been in wonderful places, had met wonderful people; and now, weary but happy, I was back in my cosy old cot, where I can sit and recall the grandeur of the Barron Falls, the weird silence of Lakes Eacham and Barine, the Kanakas who dwell outside Mackay, and, more than all, the inspired kindness—gifts of flowers, fruit and lovely souvenirs which were lavished upon me from the beginning to the end of my voyage.



## Later Years of the A.A.B.

At the time of writing this chapter, February 1945, the jubilee year of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind had almost arrived. In the course of half a century of active work for my handicapped fellows, it is natural that we should have faced some periods of crises. I have mentioned one which affected me greatly, when I entered the Education Department; another occurred when the Association, at the suggestion of the Charities Board, entered into a financial agreement with the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.

By this agreement we surrendered to the other party all our means of gathering funds—subscriber lists, collectors, concert itineraries, etc., and in return we were to receive an agreed fixed sum with which to conduct our activities.

But the arrangement did not prove sufficiently plastic and when, after two or three years, we asked for a revision of the conditions, the institute summarily broke the agreement. We were left stranded, with no source of revenue, and were forced to begin over again building up our position, and since then our work has never looked back.

I have mentioned my return to the presidential chair, and I was happy to be in office again, and making myself useful to the organisation. For some years things went smoothly, and things were satisfactory in all respects. But I was unfortunate in getting an infection in the right hand, and for nearly a year could not use that important member, while my health was on that account inadequate for any kind of public work. I offered to resign, but the members re-elected me, on the understanding that the vice-presidents should perform all the

routine tasks for me, leaving me free to regain my strength at my own fireside.

In the meantime a small body of the members began to show dissatisfaction with this arrangement. They came to the meetings, practising obstructionist tactics, delaying business, and making the duties of the chairman both arduous and unpleasant.

Most of the members of this small coterie were in the younger group and, with the confidence of youth, they thought that they could manage the affairs of the Association more successfully than those who had founded and carried on the work for so many years. They wanted to wrest all power from the existing committee, and had not shown themselves willing to come in and learn, and gradually take over the burden as the older ones dropped out.

At length, in the early part of 1943, this ferment culminated in a demand for a special meeting of the whole body of members, to which notice was given of a motion to remove from office the president and other members of the committee, because of their age, health condition or incompetence. The group which demanded this meeting to clean up the personnel comprised less than twenty-five out of our five hundred and fifty odd members, and from the beginning it was apparent that this minority had plans for taking over the affairs of the organisation themselves. I am convinced that they had no conception of the amount of work nor the difficulties which faced them, nor did they realise how necessary it is to grow into work like this, as our long-tried committee had done.

The meeting was called, and everybody had his say — the malcontents got no support from the general body. The meeting voted for the retention of the old committee by an overwhelming majority and, though bitterly hurt by this attempt to discredit the work of myself and my colleagues, I, for one, hoped that in due time the storm would pass, and that the younger set would be induced to co-operate with the older

workers and so gradually fit themselves to carry the responsibility. We who had done so for forty-eight years knew that our term of usefulness must come to an end in the near future, and we were anxious to secure the continuity of the work on the same democratic lines in which it had been conceived, even when we should be no longer here to watch over it. But just before this no-confidence meeting was held, another blow fell upon us, which was infinitely more grievous to me than the noisy bumptious criticisms of my young blind friends.

In the State of Victoria, as is well known, there exists a Charities Act, under which organisations of a philanthropic kind may be incorporated, but such incorporation carries with it a form of government differing essentially from ours in the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, whose constitution gave every member equal rights.

From the beginning it had been my object to give the blind members the final say in their own affairs, and in order to promote this policy every member must be blind, and have a vote on every question. Incorporated societies are controlled by a committee elected by the subscribers only, a mode of government differing from the one we had pursued. But always we had had co-operating with us a small group of sighted people, willing to let us run our Association in our own way, and happy to know that we should thus realise our citizenship in service, and accepting for our sakes a back seat in the chariot of independence we drove.

Now, the aggressive younger set, by their rudeness and obstruction, gave offence to some of these non-blind friends. A few of them got together, without the knowledge of one blind member, and in spite of the dissent of a majority of the seeing workers, drew up a petition to the Charities Board begging that we be forced to incorporate, and they secured the necessary twenty-five signatures before presenting it.

This petition was signed by no important officer such as the president, the treasurer, and the chairman of the finance

committee. From time to time our work had been surveyed by the Charities Board, and had never received anything but commendation, so the Chief Inspector, knowing the peculiar constitution under which we had conducted our affairs, thought that the blind, who had in forty-eight years built up a fine organisation and large assets, had some rights as well as the sighted citizen who merely contributed a pound a year. Thus there began months of negotiation, endless meetings and conferences, in which we found the Charities Board friendly, but the Charities Act not quite so accommodating. We were anxious to arrive at a scheme of government which would still leave some power in the hands of the blind themselves, and we sought the help of a good legal firm with specialist knowledge of such work.

I shall never cease to be grateful to Mr John Adam, the man of law who took up our cause. Every step was guarded and watched by him, to close every loophole which might leave us vulnerable, and in the end an incorporated constitution was drawn up, the members and contributors adopting it at their respective summoned meetings.

So, in the year 1944, we started out on new lines. As founder and leader of this society, this brotherhood of the sightless for nearly half a century, I have accepted what seems to me the best settlement; nevertheless, I am compelled to acknowledge that I do so with deep sorrow and disappointment, since I am convinced that our brotherhood is no more, and that a deadly blow has been delivered to our people in the very centre and soul of their independence and self-respect. Quite a definite share in the management has been preserved for them, but it is no longer the unique vehicle of self-expression that was always my aim, and whose strong spirit was maintained through the years in the face of fluctuating interest and opposition.

Into our ranks had crept the unrest of the times, with its destructive, iconoclastic tendency, yet offering nothing to re-



place the old order satisfactorily. The whole affair would not have been so bitter to me if it had been free from the element of treachery and intrigue, and I grieve for my lost child.

I try to comfort my heart by owning that our work is now important, and our assets considerable, and that perhaps the time for a change had come—I can only hope that the life-long labors of myself and my comrades, fostered and encouraged by so many seeing members of the community, may not suffer any check through the tempest that lately passed over us. But I may be forgiven if I mourn a little over the old and cherished ways for I still hold steadfastly to my former love. I still think it would be better to make mistakes in managing ourselves, than to submit to be managed by others. After a lapse of a year the pain has become less poignant and my chief desire is that the work shall go on, though I shall soon be no longer a part of it. At a meeting of the contributors called to adopt the new constitution, I delivered a brief summary of the position, which I have decided to include here, because I want the world to know how ardent, how sincere, how tenacious we were in our efforts to raise the status of the blind, and I print this speech to refute any secret insinuation that we did anything but the best for the cause for which we labored.

In 1945 we are celebrating the jubilee of the Association. We are proud of what has been accomplished, and my personal feeling is one of thankfulness, since I have been able to add my weight to the pull. With sincere purpose I have placed at the service of the blind of this State all of the talents I possessed, striving for better conditions in which they must shoulder their handicap. I feel that it is but fair to mention that I never received wages or salary for my part in this work, for I fought my own economic problem as a musician, teacher and writer. The sense of satisfaction is dearer to me than any material reward—I have done my bit, and the future must be the richer for it.



## SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE MEETING OF CONTRIBUTORS CALLED TO ADOPT THE INCORPORATED CONSTITUTION OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE BLIND ON 1 DECEMBER 1943

Ladies and Gentlemen: This meeting of the contributors of the A.A.B. has been summoned to consider a scheme for the incorporation under the Charities Act and, as the scheme we submit differs in many respects from the one you aimed at, it is advisable that its consideration should be prefaced with some explanations. The incorporation sought by twenty-five of you, when you lodged a petition with the Charities Board, was such that it would have excluded from any voice in the management every blind person, including myself, and would have wrested from us who have managed its affairs every right and all assets we have won over a period of forty-eight years.

This petition of yours was a shock to us, for no protest had come from you, no complaint that you were not satisfied with the conditions of spending the money which you gave for the good of the blind. The first intimation we had of the petition was from the Inspector of Charities, who, knowing the peculiar constitution and make-up of our organisation, felt that we blind people had rights as well as you. I do not know what inducement was offered to bring about your action, but the lodging of this petition behind our backs, so to speak, seemed to carry with it an implication that we blind people had been mismanaging your funds, and doing you an injustice by not giving you a share in the control.

This implication has been a cruel blow to the spirit of our blind people, the repercussions of which I view with the deepest sorrow. In this Association we had found a way of realising our citizenship in service to others—service to a class

about which we know infinitely more than the best informed of you, and to deprive us of this chance of a fuller life would be a graver injustice than any you imagine has been done to you. Let me remind you of the origins of this work.

Forty-eight years ago I called together a few blind friends to talk over the needs of our class, and we felt that there was indeed a great deal to be done, so we formed The Association for the Advancement of the Blind, and I have led it ever since. I need not go into details, but we started it with our own personal shillings—eight of them in all—and we have gradually built up this very fine organisation, which is now to be incorporated. Through the years we have had harmony, save for one or two family squabbles, and the best of the blind have always been linked up with us to help. Among these have been many who started and ran good businesses of their own, such as Mr David Robertson, who is with us today as he was at the foundation meeting; Mr Blake, a successful grocer in Carlton, and others too numerous to mention. There were also retired business men who had lost their sight, such as Mr T. Lowe, father of Justice Lowe; Mr Holgate, accountant of a leading wool-broking firm; old Mr Isaacs, of the distinguished family of that name, and Mr Campbell, the sound and wise old Scot, who was president, if I remember rightly, of the Union of Engineers. Then there was George Maxwell, M.L.A., who even before his blindness was our friend, and later became our blind president. We still have Mr Alfred Pearce who, in spite of his loss of sight, goes on with his practice as a solicitor in the city. It was with the aid of such brains that we were able to go on building.

But we were not so stupid as to imagine that we could run big finance, and conduct homes and hostels, without the aid of the sighted. All along the march of progress we have had a host of outstanding men and women, who were only too glad to help us run this work, asking nothing for themselves, and rejoicing with us in our aspirations after self-help in service.

Let me mention a few of them. First was Miss Elsie Tait, now Mrs Lawrence, who, as a young girl, stepped in to be our assistant secretary, and is still one of our best beloved friends. There were Robert Solly, Frank Tudor, O. R. Snowball and W. H. Edgar, all public men and in our Parliaments; Sir Malcolm McEachern, who helped me in the negotiation for concessions on the tramways; there was Charles Monteath, a member of the founding firm in South Melbourne; Dr S. McBurney and, most loyal of all our friends, Mr and Mrs W. H. Paterson.

These, and a host besides, of good seeing folk, stood by us and helped us to realise our ideals, and so we kept on building and growing.

I want to take this final opportunity of assuring you that at no time in the forty-eight years of our history has the public money been in danger of misuse. Always, at least from the time when we began to launch out in a bigger way, we had ample guards for the funds—a sighted business man as our treasurer, a vigilant committee, qualified auditors; and intense economy was effected, because the blind themselves did much of the work without any remuneration. We doubt whether any organisation working for the good of our handicapped citizens ever did more with the funds collected than we did with ours, which never exceeded three thousand pounds in the best year.

But today we desire to lay aside reproaches and protests, and to bind together our forces into a solid block for the sake of the cause. As before stated, the Inspector of Charities suggested that a scheme by which both blind and sighted might share in the control of the work could be devised under section sixty-seven of the Charities Act. This section makes it possible for the contributors to adopt at a special meeting a set of by-laws providing for this form of government.

The matter was handed over to a committee of our Association and, after months of deliberation, in which we sought the

best legal advice, a constitution has been drawn up which meets the approval of the Charities Board.

Mr Adam, who has been our legal adviser throughout, is here today to help us if necessary, so we submit the plan with confidence, believing that you will accept it for the sake of the forty-eight years in which we blind people have carried on the work. We need your co-operation now as much as we ever needed our sighted friends, but we are certain that you also need ours, if the best results are to follow this change of policy, since we can bring to the work that equipment born of experience as fellows and brothers of those whom we desire to comfort and bless. So, ladies and gentlemen, we present the new by-laws for your adoption.

TILLY ASTON, PRESIDENT

## Frank Smiley

*17 August 1944*

Today I have bidden farewell to a friend whom I valued and respected most sincerely. This was Frank Smiley, president of the old Cobb & Co. Coach-drivers' Association, who has gone from this earthly scene at the ripe age of eighty-seven. As we sat in the Presbyterian Church, Alma Road, St. Kilda, where he attended and served as session clerk, I felt that a more fitting send-off could not have been devised for him.

The casket rested where the beautiful lights from the pictured window fell upon it, surrounded by a mass of glorious flowers, with the organ singing its soft, sweet melodies, and the hush of reverence over the big congregation assembled. It was just as he would have wished it. He loved beauty, flowers, music, and the dignities of life. The clergyman, Rev. Alexander Fraser, spoke such words of the departed as I should like to have heard of my own father and, as his friend, they moved me deeply, and filled me with pride.

So he passed on to his grave at St. Kilda Cemetery, yet I know he will live in the memory of a host of his fellows, to whom his cheerful personality was like a sea breeze in summer.

During recent years I had seen a good deal of this remarkable old man. Often in the cold evenings he would drop in at my cottage for a chat, happy and comfortable in the glow of the fire, since he was only boarding at a house where a warm hearth was a rare amenity. We would talk of our mutual friends and acquaintances, swap yarns, and have a bit of old-time music of which he was very fond. In his younger days he sang a very good tenor, so I would brush up some of



his songs, and while I played on the piano "Romany Lass," "Good Company," and "Queen of the Earth," he would join in with what voice age had left to him. Needless to say, yarns of coaching days were always to the fore, and what did it matter if sometimes they were repeated again and again.

Mr Smiley used to delight in telling me how he drove the Western District magnates up and to Ballarat for cattle sales, weddings, funerals and elections. One special pride was his, that he had driven Lady Hodges to Ballarat to buy her trousseau, when she was preparing for her first marriage to one of the Chirnsides. This most gracious lady always kept in touch with Mr Smiley. From her famous garden at "Dreamthorpe," Macedon, she would send him quantities of choice flowers when he had one of his pilgrimages to the graves of old-timers. He introduced her to me through my books, and I had some correspondence with her, and an invitation to visit her garden—a pleasure I missed, as war came, and I was unable to travel up to the Mount before the mistress of "Dreamthorpe" passed away.

When Mr Smiley broke his thigh, I wrote this news to her, and her immediate reply was a magnificent basket of fruit and flowers, delivered at his bedside in the Alfred Hospital.

One day Frank asked me if I would write a verse or two for the annual report of the Coach-drivers. I gave him the tribute which appears at the end of this sketch, and which I also read over the air on one occasion, much to his delight. As a result I was elected an honorary member of the Old Cobb & Co. Coach-drivers Association, and included in the invitations to the annual dinner given to members by Mr and Mrs Wallace Mitchell. It was always a gala day, and I enjoy meeting the old boys, pioneers of early and arduous travel into the out-back regions of this State. I fear it may not be quite the same now the genial president is not with us.

The friend whom I have farewelled today was a very interesting man. Clean in body and mind, with the outlook of a

youth in most matters, splendid in physique, his long, capable hands betokening fine breeding somewhere, he had not fallen a victim to the petty vices which were apt to beset the men who shuttled up and down the roads fifty or sixty years ago. Alcohol and tobacco he did not use and, apart from the tales which he himself owned up to be "snake yarns," he was a worshipper at the altar of truth.

He gave me as a keepsake the book, *When Cobb & Co. Was King*, written by Will Lawson. In it was embodied the story of the boyhood of Frank Smiley, although the book as a whole does not conform to facts as far as his later life is concerned.

I visited him a week or two back, when his strength was failing sadly. He held my hand and said, "The long day closes," and I agreed. He then said, "The anthem says, 'He giveth his beloved sleep'." And thus he went away, firm in the faith that for him the future was full of goodness and peace. So—Farewell, Friend of Mine!

## Tribute to the Old Coach-Drivers

ESPECIALLY TO MY FRIEND, FRANK SMILEY

Resting where a Sun-kissed wattle  
 Spread its tent beside the road  
 'Mid the hills, where browsing cattle  
 Blest the Earth for gifts bestowed.

Far away among the Rises,  
 Faint and far the echoes sound,  
 Though the distance still disguises  
 Throbbing hoof-beats on the ground.

MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

Round the bend and down the valley,  
Where the gracious waters flow,  
Through the Bluegum's shady alley  
Comes the Coach of Cobb & Co.

Roll of wheels and harness jingle,  
Snapping whips and shouts of cheer!  
How it makes the red blood tingle,  
As the racing team draws near.

Dust and tumult! Then it passes  
Onward with its daily dole,  
Lifting from Despair's morasses  
Many a desert-ridden soul.

Echoes, memories, golden dreaming  
In this age of speeding car!  
Gone the days of Coaches streaming  
O'er the Highways flung afar.

But a grateful salutation  
To those valiant men I bring,  
Builders in our growing nation,  
When old Cobb and Co. was King.

## New Friends

One of the saddening features of old age is the loss of capacity to make and keep new friends, a loss the more keenly felt because the ranks of old ones are rapidly thinning down. In time the older folk find their intimacies reduced to a mere handful of acquaintances, and thus they miss so much of the supreme enjoyment that had been the stay and radiance of their earlier days. Realising this, I have clung tenaciously to every chance of acquiring new friends, and of fostering cordial relations, if not sincere affection, wherever it seemed possible. I feel that I have succeeded, and I go on enriching my experience with the warm intercourse between myself and many people, both old and young, some of whom are newly won contacts of quite recent times. It is with considerable pleasure, therefore, that I tell the brief story of my interest in Stan and Betty Brogden, still little more than infants in arrival within my closer circle.

Years ago, when I was in my early twenties, I sometimes paid a visit to my sister Sophia at Carisbrook, and on one occasion I met there some young Welshmen, lovers of singing, and endowed with excellent voices. They were cousins, two Joneses and a Roberts, all of the enthusiastic type, and they soon ganged up with me for a jolly good old sing-song in the evenings. Before I returned to Melbourne we gave a concert for the benefit of the Presbyterian Church.

The whole programme was made up of this irregular quartette of ours, and we got plenty of fun out of rolling out the old songs, to which were added a couple of Welsh hymns which I happened to know, and the time-honored glees, "The Wreath," "The Village Chorister," and "Hail, Smiling Morn." We thought the programme rather good, and

so did the audience, apparently if encores count for anything. Well, I did not meet these young singers again, as they had moved to another district before my next visit to my native town. Then, about nine years ago, *The Sun* newspaper gave me a good write-up, and a few weeks later a young lady called at my home, told me she was Betty Roberts, a teacher from the MacRobertson High School, and that her father, now living near Warragul, had seen the article in *The Sun* and had asked her to look me up and find out if I were the same Miss Aston of the Carisbrook concert. In this manner I became acquainted with Miss Betty Roberts, a charming girl of intense enthusiasms, and quickly a genuine attachment sprang up between us. It grew to be a regular practice with her to drop in for a chat after school, and soon I felt that I had accomplished that difficult thing, the attainment of a real friendship between a young woman like Betty and myself, a woman of sixty.

Betty liked books and music, and our tastes in these matters were identical. She also appreciated my own literary efforts—a capital basis on which to build up a mutual liking.

By-and-bye there appeared on the scene a young man friend, who was duly introduced to me, and at once fell into his own particular niche in my esteem. I soon perceived that my two young friends had a more than ordinary interest for each other. I watched their love affair growing, until they came along one day to tell me the surprising news of their engagement. Of course, I was really not surprised, but let that go. The lover of Betty was a young literary aspirant, who had spent some time in London, doing freelance and journalistic work. For the time, at least, he meant to stay in Australia, and now there was the dear girl to serve as an additional anchor to this end.

Stan Brogden and Betty Roberts were married, and now together they are aiming at big things in the realm of letters, towards which a start has been made by the publication of



several small books. At this time of writing, 1945, it is not quite clear in exactly what sphere of authorship Stan will be most successful, but succeed he will, for all the thrill and enthusiasm of Betty Roberts still surges up in Mrs Stan Brogden, and cannot fail to stimulate her husband to yet higher and higher efforts. I may not live to see the crown of their lives in this direction, but I am glad to share their hopes of youth, to lend a sympathetic ear, and to lay bare before them my own plans and aspirations.

I shall always remember two opportunities which Stan put in my way. The first was a broadcast interview on 3XY, the first broadcast of that kind in which I was heard over the air. It brought me some publicity, and some fan mail, renewing some neglected friendships, and bringing fresh aspects of life to my notice.

The other experience which came to me through Stan was an invitation to go out to Heidelberg Military Hospital to speak to a group of the boys in the programme of the Army Education Service. I greatly dared when I talked about the appreciation of poetry on the Australian countryside, but the dear invalids listened, and at the end gathered around me in a swarm, asking questions, and examining my Braille notes with interest. Possibly the lady lecturer was more important to them than what she said. If so, I hope some spirit of courage went forth to these lads in their hour of trouble.

It is in this wise that Stan and Betty Brogden bring to me a sense of good will and almost a filial respect not always granted to one as the years pile up.

There are others of the present day younger writers whom I have met sometimes, such as Edward Harrington, perhaps the true successor to Henry Lawson, but with most of these I have not established anything like an intimate association. With Cyril Goode it is different. With him and his wife I have found a relation more cordial and friendly. This young

author and poet has been through the mill of adversity, and, in places, his work bears the mark of it. Still, he can draw from the depths of experience so much that is sweet and beautiful that I feel him to be a spirit akin to my own. While his hands toil with metal and machines—for he is an engineer and mechanic—his thoughts roam over the bush and bring back to the written page all the color and light that a poet would find there, and a sense of quiet joy is often with him as he writes.

In his little home at Newport, Melbourne, shared with his devoted wife and small daughter, he lives with his books and garden, and sings his songs and tells his stories whenever the pressure of life permits. Like Stan Brogden, his niche as an author is awaiting him in the future, and may it be a very warm and comfortable spot for him, when time has done all it can for his art and powers.

But to return to the Brogdens. With them I can laugh, and offer playful suggestions, and one such gesture is the set of verses following, which were sent to Betty once when she was on vacation, and wrote that she was making a shrub garden at her parents' home. I told her that my superior list of summers lived entitled me to offer advice.

## When Betty Makes a Garden

When Betty makes a garden,  
With shrubs and bushes planned,  
I'd like to be upon the spot,  
And lend a helping hand—  
For when the Spring and Summer  
Call forth the blossoms there,  
I know in Betty's garden  
I'd surely have a share.

She'd give me showery wattle,  
As gold as dawning day,  
And Crimson Rambler roses warm,  
And cool and snowy May;  
Long chains of bright Laburnum,  
And butter-colored Broom,  
And thus would Betty's garden  
Make Sunshine in my room.

If I were Betty's neighbor,  
And full her garden grown,  
I'd sniff the breathing odors rich  
In through my window blown,  
From Loquat flower and Almond,  
And Oleander tall,  
From Laurel, and from Lilac,  
The dearest of them all.

Yes, straight from Betty's garden  
 She'd bring me Lilac flower,  
 In mauve, like stately lady  
 In old-time lady's bower;  
 And wreaths of Honeysuckle  
 She'd pilfer from the bee,  
 And Jasmine from the trellis,  
 To share them all with me.

When Betty makes a garden  
 For shrubs and bushes planned,  
 I'd like to be Godmother there,  
 And name the lovely band—  
 Thus I in Betty's garden  
 Would have a rightful share,  
 And in my quiet chamber  
 I'd breathe its incense rare.

## Philosophical

Through the highlights of my story the reader has been led by this record and, if he has held his way from page to page, he will know that I have had my share of shadows, and likewise a goodly portion of very happy days. Now that the record is about to close, I feel moved to speak briefly of some of the guiding principles which have been the motive force of many, if not most, of my activities.

Some years ago I was brought into contact with a young chemist who, through an accident in the laboratory, had become totally blind. He was anxious to win the battle over his handicap, and we had many conversations about the matter.

One day he asked me to write down for him some guiding rules which I considered to have aided me in what he thought a successful career. He was surprised to learn that up to that time I had never formulated any specific rules for my conduct, but had just gone along practising the ideals and principles gathered subconsciously throughout the years. He set me thinking, and I soon realised that I was in fact led always by certain ideals, even though they might be overshadowed at times by human frailty or uncontrollable circumstance.

When I tried to analyse what had motivated my behavior, I became aware that everything originated in the knowledge that the best, the only way of life, was to follow the teaching of the Divine Master, Jesus Christ.

From childhood I had striven to know His Precepts, and to measure all things by the pattern of His Love. My parents had been religious in the true sense and, without any lapse



into sanctimoniousness, they had insisted on church-going, on rigid conformity to the Commandments and upon the Christian practice of the Golden Rule; thus their children, including myself, grew up in the somewhat Puritan tenets of John Wesley.

With such a background it was easy to gather a permanent store of texts from Scripture and handy bits of wisdom so convenient as lamps on the troubled pathway of aspiration to higher planes. Here the native qualities of my mother had their own weight. She, and father, too, had no education in the ordinary acceptance of the word. They knew nothing of schools and colleges. Father had learned to read and write in his boyhood from his mother, who had those accomplishments, but his wife acquired a knowledge of reading at the Baptist Sunday School in Coleford, Gloucestershire.

The use of the pen was not hers until the time when her lover was obliged to be absent for a time in another town, and then she taught herself to write from copy-books, so that she might be spared the necessity of calling in a third person as scribe for her love letters, as was stated earlier in this story.

Now, in those days copy-books were liberally adorned with motto, maxim, text and proverb, culled from Solomon, Aesop, Isaac Watts, and the book of wisdom that belongs to the common people of every nation. Mother had a mind stored with these wise sayings and, as far as I can remember, there was something appropriate to well nigh every occasion. If we lifted our voice in complaint, out would come:

A cheerful Spirit goes on quick,  
While Grumblers in the mud will stick.

Let us indulge in a bit of back-biting, or in a trifle of gossip or scandal, and we would be admonished with:

Premeditate your speech; words once flown,  
Are in the hearer's power, and not your own.

How often came the warnings, "A stitch in time saves nine," or "Waste not, want not," and our bathing was solaced by the statement that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

Perhaps in these sophisticated times we laugh at such teaching, but, after all, it was good and, better still, it stayed in the memory. Often would our parents entertain us with the poems and songs of Dr Watts, to stimulate industry, thrift and family unity, and to warn us of vanity, selfishness and against lapses from filial piety. At this distance of time I can hear mother reciting: "'Tis the voice of the sluggard," or "How doth the little busy bee," "Birds in their little nests agree," "'Tis dog's delight to bark and bite," and many more. Indeed, I love those odd old rhymes, even if I laugh at them now.

With the lapse of time, and the fuller realisation of my handicap, it was borne in upon me that I needed some additional philosophy which might be applied to my own personal problems, and which was not to be found in mother's maxims and rhymes, nor in the verses of the old school-master, Dr Watts. First, as a spirit of independence asserted itself very early, I was determined not to let other people do for me, because of my blindness, anything that I could do for myself. Applied to all the trifling daily offices of my life, this has been the very key to self-help. Of course, kind hearts in the breasts of kindred and friends always prompt them to offer the aid they think is needed; but for the sightless not otherwise afflicted in health, it is their very salvation and happiness to let them do all they can for themselves, giving play to every faculty of the body, and to every inward resource, so necessary for the development of the human soul. By the persistent practice of this rule I have been able to win such independence as I possess.

Next in importance has been my resistance to discouragement. How often it has been said to me, "You can't do this," or "You can't do that!" More than once a sighted acquaintance has been offended when I protested, "How do you know? You have no right to say I can't, until I have tried and failed!" Thus I have pursued my way, attempting everything that I thought worthwhile, disregarding the gloomy predictions of sympathetic but unpractical advisers. Failures have come to me, and from them I have learned lessons, but the will to do things has tested my capacity to the full, and saved me from many disappointments I might have had. It must be confessed that I have never admitted an inferiority complex, save in one aspect, which was shown in the constant desire to excel as a woman in spite of my handicap, since I knew that to overcome I must use more of myself than a seeing person to attain to equal power and status. Always I resented any attempt on the part of others to lower my crest, for I regard it as the part of weaklings and lazy folk to lean on others and accept unchallenged the patronage of less understanding people. To become self-helpful, and at the same time fitted to render service, I convinced myself that "God helps him who helps himself"—another of mother's maxims. As a rule her maternal instinct was with me in my strivings for growth and independence; only on rare occasions did she resort to the "You can't do it" method of obstructing my enterprise or ambition.

Although my chief interests have been among blind school mates and friends, I was not slow to test my powers in the company of those who see. I entered for competitions, joined literary clubs, and made companions of fully endowed women, enjoying the effort to keep pace with them in their adventures. This kind of free intercourse with the ordinary world made an appreciable contribution to my progress. Any condition approaching segregation tends to limit the horizon no less in the realms of the mental than the physical;

hence I felt I must not depend on my fellows in the dark for moulding my outlook on life for stimulus towards attainment, and for a true estimate of my own abilities. To range my wits against the ordinary thinker, to exchange ideas and opinions with those of wider opportunities—this was indeed a liberal education. Briefly, I aimed at reducing the impression of singularity to the minimum, and I believe that in so doing lay wisdom.

In order to pursue this policy, I had to check down on touchiness, and to cultivate a lively sense of humor. Such repression was useful, for it gave me self-control and serenity of poise in many embarrassing circumstances to come from time to time. So I was always glad to widen my circle, gaining for my own many lovely possessions which could have come to me in no other way.

As I have grown older, like most sane people, I have become aware of the steadying down of the fires of purpose; judgment is calmer, enthusiasm more reasonable and often censoriousness is softened and sweetened. Perhaps this is due to the knowledge that ultimate issues of the things we do and the thoughts we cherish are never laid bare at once. With the temperament of an individualist, and with convictions always clearly defined, I suppose it is natural that I should have encountered opposition, and been forced to fight my way through many troubles and obstacles. At the time these battles were grievous, and odious to the taste, until they were far enough behind me to be seen in their true perspective—then, in calmer mood, with the edges and stings blunted by time, I have been able to recognise the truth that, in the hands of God, even the evil can be made to work for good. Therefore, as I close this story I am happy to sum up my faith in those words of Holy Writ: "All things work together for good to them that love God."

## The Search

Ever I sought for God, to find him near,  
 Since the dim, moulding days of infancy,  
 When parents read the words of Holy Seer,  
 And spoke of God with faith and constancy.  
 'Twas then I knew Him as a Father kind,  
 And gently loving as a Mother's kiss,  
 And walked confiding by the black abyss,  
 Where death and sickness howl like Arctic wind.

Then came the rousing days of ardent youth,  
 When I, a conscript, must arise and fight  
 All that opposed fair dealing, love and truth.  
 But who should lead me in the path of Light?  
 A man of God cried, "See, your standard borne!"  
 And forth to battle went I in the train  
 Of Him who shall for endless æons reign,  
 And lead through sorrow to Eternal Morn.

But oft the soldier wearies in the field,  
 And vision dwindles to the trodden ways,  
 Hopes broken, stubborn foes that will not yield,  
 And raining tears make dim the heavy days;  
 And, yearning still, I seek the forest nave,  
 Or Ocean strand, where I may drink the breeze,  
 And find Him glorious, walking 'mid the trees,  
 Or Spirit-bright upon the flaming wave.

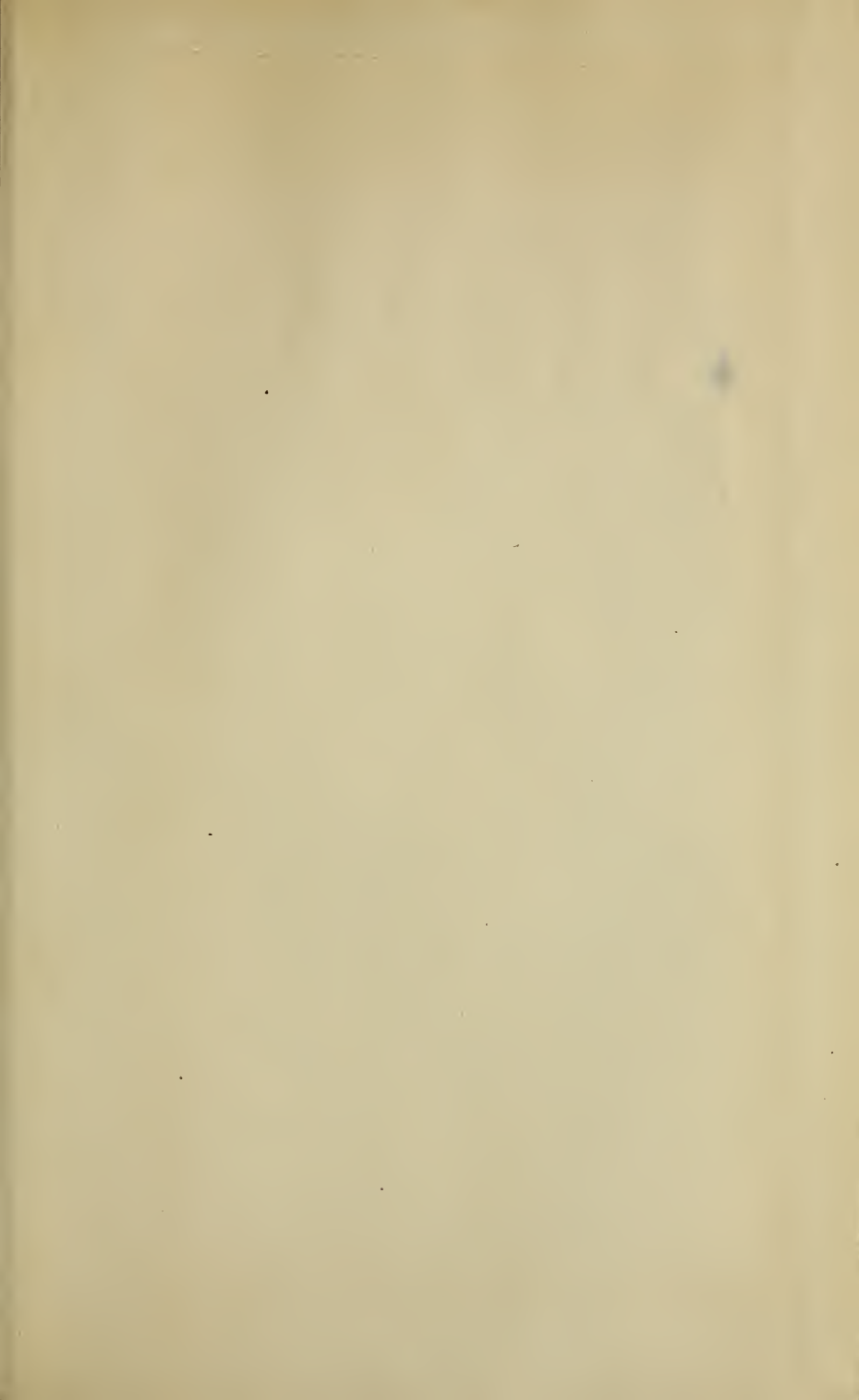


MEMOIRS OF TILLY ASTON

O gracious hour, when to my home I haste,  
And sit before my hearth to rest and dream,  
Repairing all the bitter conflict's waste,  
In a calm shallow of Life's racing stream!  
No need to seek for God, for He is here,  
And all-pervading, like the balm of sleep,  
A tender Presence fraught with comfort deep,  
Close to my soul as to my lips the air.



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Aston, Tilly

Memoirs of Tilly Aston.

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